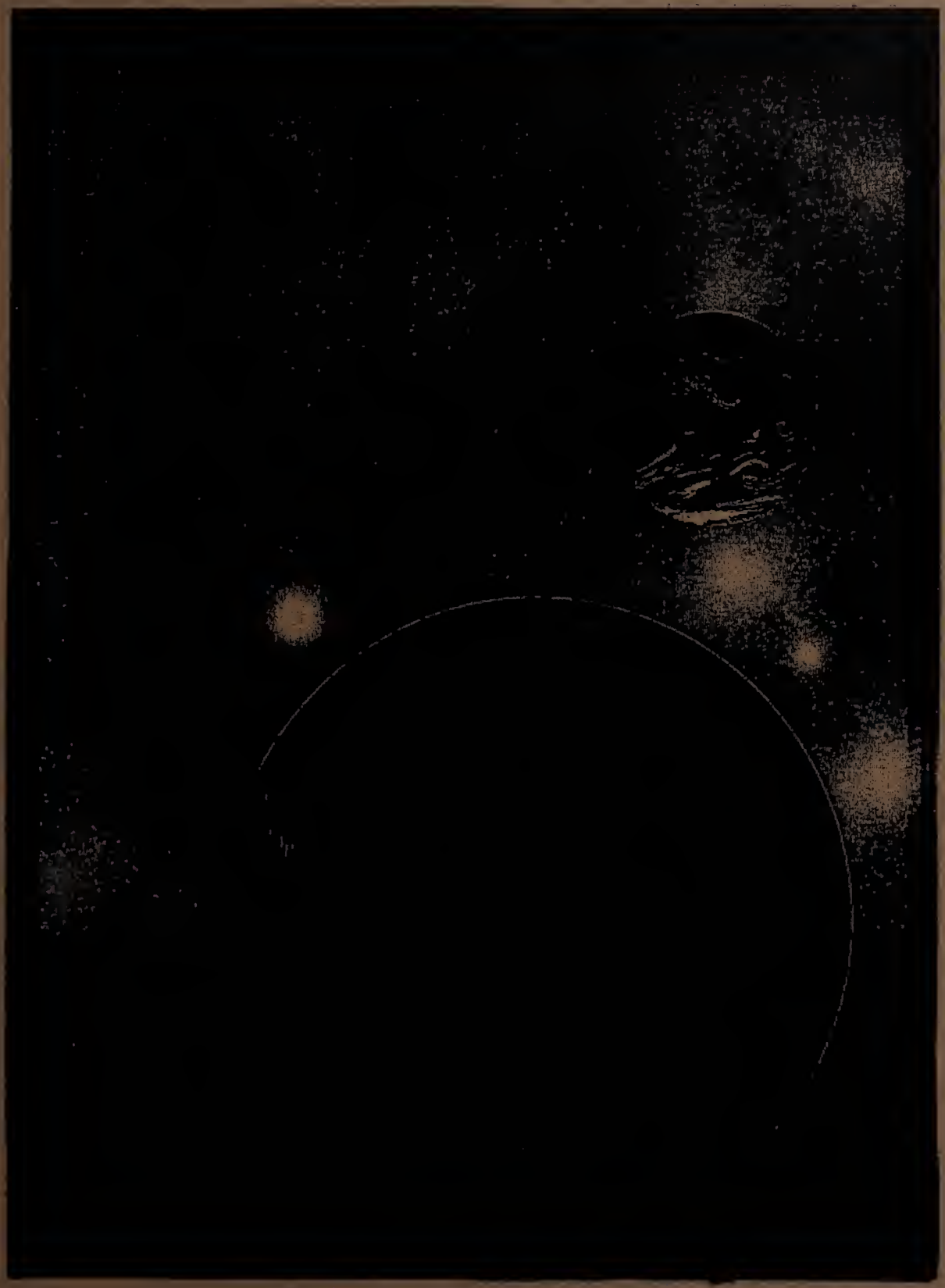
Writers In Progress



2002-2003

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Eric LaPlume is this year's cover artist. He is 29 years old and was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2002. He is a graphic design major at NECC. When he is not in school, Eric enjoys creating 3D pictures and designing business cards.

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Dedication

To all the students who think they can't,
and all the students who know they can.

Because of the large number of submissions we receive each year, we are faced with the difficult task of choosing which papers to publish. Space limitations prevent us from printing every paper we receive. We apologize because we believe that every writer who has had the courage and pride to offer his or her work for publication deserves recognition. This issue is dedicated to you.

We honor submissions from:

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Table of Contents

Introduction *by Lynne Nadeau*.....iv

Describing a Place:
"Our Night Out at Mr. Mike's" *by Heather Comtois*.....1
"Weekend Nights" *by Sarah Guard*.....3
"A Room Over Time" *by Pamela O'Brien*.....5

Describing a Person:
"My Best Friend" *by David Chiasson*.....7
"The Wonderful Character of My Mom" *by Laura Concheri*.....9
"Like No Other" *by Donna Herman*.....11
"My Love" *by Irene Michaud*.....14

Remembering an Experience:
"Curiosity Does Kill the Cat" *by Yelitza Bastardo*.....17
"The Decision" *by Felix Gonzalez*.....19
"An Unusual Day of Vacation" *by Gyöngyvèr Màrdirosz*.....22

Analyzing a Job:
"Learning from My Job" *by Lisa Hubley*.....24
"The Ice-Cream Girl" *by Katherine Liranzo* 27
"Fitting In" *by Leroy Montañez*.....30

Music's Influence:
"The Influence Music Has Awakened in Me" *by Sheila Arias*.....33
"Beats That Soothe the Mind" *by Guillermo Exposito*.....35
"The Salsa with Savor (Flavor)" *by Katherine Marte*.....37

Outlining a Process:
"Becoming a Successful Girl Scout Leader" *by Lisa Beaulieu*.....39
"How to Pack the Perfect Suitcase" *by Paulina Engel*.....41
"A Bright Start" *by Beverly Sheehan*.....43

Supporting an Opinion:
"The Negative Effects of Media" *by Kavuma Mubiazalwa*.....45
"The State of Sin" *by Nathan Myers*.....47
"The City Government of Lawrence" *by Matilde Perez*.....48

Introduction

by Lynne Nadeau

When a teacher introduces a class to the Basic Writing curriculum at Northern Essex Community College, most students are not familiar with the idea of writing as a process. They hear about prewriting, first drafts, tutoring sessions, revising and editing, and they wonder, "How will I do all that? I'm so busy already! How complicated is this going to be?" The everyday high-school task of writing seems suddenly alien and confusing.

During the 16 weeks that these students are basic writers, their teachers guide them as they practice the elements of the writing process. The students begin to understand the vocabulary that writers use to talk about writing, and they begin to discover what works for each of them. One student may learn that a cluster prewriting is a great way for her to get started. Another prefers outlines because he needs his ideas organized before he writes a draft. A third discovers that she needs extra time spent on editing for her papers to meet the standards for college writing. With each paper, these classmates gain confidence, practice skills, and learn to think like writers.

By the end of the semester, what seemed strange and foreign at first has become natural. In a recent essay, a former Basic Writing student wrote that writing isn't "something from another world," but a step-by-step process that he has succeeded in learning. In fact, he and his classmates are far more prepared for the college tasks ahead of them now that they have completed Basic Writing.

Every semester, as they practice the writing process, many Basic Writing students surprise themselves by producing appealing, successful papers that their instructors recommend for *Writers In Progress*. The authors of this year's collection are student writers who have explored the apparently alien territory of college writing, familiarized themselves with the writing process, and created confident, memorable essays.

Our Night Out at Mr. Mike's
by Heather Comtois

When my husband, Ronnie, got home from work he had a sneaky look on his face, a sly smile. He then filled me in, telling me that his sister was taking the kids for the night. I thought why, but before asking him he said, "We're going out to eat at Mr. Mike's Restaurant and Lounge." I got very excited. We haven't gone out in a while or got a babysitter either so I knew I was in for a great night. We got the children ready and took them to his sister's house and were on our way. We got there and I fixed my makeup before going in, as he hurried me.

As I walked through the metal door with glass at Mr. Mike's Restaurant and Lounge, there was a small corridor, confined with a toy machine in it. There were all sorts of toys to win like stuffed animals, watches, toy cars and piggy banks in all sorts of colors. Then as I opened the next door, I saw a lot of lights everywhere. I even saw old Christmas lights (not lit) hanging on the wall. There was a scratch ticket machine, which was blue and red with five dollar and two dollar tickets in it. The aroma was wonderful, and my mouth started to water. I could smell steaks grilling, sauces simmering and vegetables steaming.

We walked down the corridor. I noticed the hostess standing by a small bar; she was anxiously awaiting us with a smile and menus in hand. As she asked "How many?" I noticed her dark brown, long, silky and curly hair with red highlights clipped up in a barrette. She must have been wearing blue contacts, because they were the color of the Bahamas blue sea water. She wore a black skirt with a silky white button-down blouse and a black blazer with a cute pin on it. She looked cheerful, polite and concerned about everyone getting good service by the kind waitresses. She introduced us to our waitress, Alice, who said she'd be right with us.

Meanwhile I could hear Sinead O'Connor singing "Nothing Compares 2 U." The walls were white with brown, wood moldings. We sat at a table with a booth. The table was brown grain wood, and it felt smooth to the touch. We sat in big, red, cushioned booths that were too far apart, I thought. There was a picture above our table. It was a nice piece and looked antique. It was an array of flowers including daffodils, daisies, sunflowers, roses and pansies in an antique vase on a dark wooden table; it was a 1950's painting. Now I heard the chatter and laughter of all the other couples, singles and the children in the restaurant.

The waitress, Alice, came and asked us our order. I looked at her and she looked like a woman in her late 50's early 60's. She had a huge smile on her face, a pear shaped face. I could tell she really loved her job. Her hair was brown in an updo with curls streaming out, and brown eyes hidden behind her pointed tip eyeglasses. I also noticed her long, pointy nose and thin lips. Alice looked like a shy, mousy lady until she started talking; she was clear, helpful and caring. She was wearing black polyester pants with a white button-down shirt, with a black, green, red and white thick tie with a black apron on with comfortable black sneakers on. They looked like nurse shoes. She reminded me of my grandmother because they have the same voice, hairdo and style.

We ordered potato skins, salads, and 2 Cokes. I got the T-bone dinner, and my husband got the prime rib dinner. As we waited I looked over to the right and saw that there was a bunch of booths raised up with a few folks sitting in them. They were so cheerful,

some wanting to win the Keno game (you bet on a number and if it comes up you win money). Behind them on the wall I saw an extraordinary mural on the wall with cars and an old business lined up that filled the whole wall. The establishment looked very old, antique like it was made in the early 1900's; it was enjoyable to look at.

The food came; potato skins and salads came first. The potato skins were in a half shell with melted Velveeta cheese and bacon bits in it. It was burnt on the bottom, tasted unsalted; however, with a pinch of salt on it, it tasted better. The salad was much better. There was lettuce, cucumbers, onions, tomatoes and olives in it. I used Italian dressing, and it tasted fresh, crunchy, with a sweet and tangy taste to it. It tasted like it had butter in it also. My T-bone dinner and Ronnie's prime rib came. Although I felt full, I still tried and it was worth it. It was wonderful, tasted so good, grilled and peppery and it melted in my mouth. The potatoes had a yummy brown gravy on them and the green beans were O.K.

Near us there was a couple and two children talking about going to church in the morning; then they were going to their grandmother's. I heard the father keep telling his daughter to keep her hair away from her mouth. I looked over again and got a good look at them. The parents looked between 33-35 years old and the little girl about 9 years old and the boy 12 years old I'd say. The father had a medium build with hazel/brown eyes; he looked like a short guy. The mother was very thin with long legs, blue eyes and blonde hair. She reminded me of one of my daughter's porcelain dolls, because of her doll-like features. Her daughter looked just like her and her son a mix between them with blue eyes and brown hair.

We got our check from Alice and thanked her as we paid her the bill and tip. We got up and I looked around again; I had an awesome time here. I heard all the people again laughing, arguing in a playful manner, and talking. This was a great place and I'd recommend it to anyone for the food, atmosphere, the fun in playing the games they have (especially Keno), the service by the kind waitress and for the beautiful paintings.

Heather took Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing course in the spring of 2003.

Weekend Nights
by Sarah Guard

On weekend nights my friends and I used to meet in the Bradford College field. The field is located in Bradford, Massachusetts, behind Bradford College. The field is surrounded by woods and in the far corner of the field is a dark wooded trail leading to a clearing with a fire pit in the middle. We used to meet here to have fires, drink beers and forget about being in high school and growing up for a while. This place has many wonderful memories for me.

When a Friday or Saturday night would arrive I would pull out my biggest, warmest and most comfortable sweater. Next I would tell my mother I was going to a friend's house. I would leave my front door, breathe in the cool night air and start the short walk to the Bradford College field. At first I could see nothing upon entering the field, and then I would hear the sound of familiar voices and see the orange glow of cigarettes flashing like fireflies in the distance.

Walking toward the voices, faces would appear white and glowing like moons. We would then start toward the trail. My feet would always get wet walking through the cool, damp grass. Walking the trail was always scary. It was pitch black and for some reason we never brought a flashlight. It was so dark that a branch would always pull my hair and rocks would always find their way under my feet. The trail always seemed to go on forever and my cold, wet feet would freeze in dark, damp night air. Nobody ever spoke above a soft whisper while walking on the trail. We were always afraid that the college security might hear us and call the police. You would always hear a stick crack or a something scamper away over the dry, crunchy leaves. The sounds always sounded louder to us than they really were because of the darkness that surrounded us.

Finally we would see the moonlight reflecting off the rocks that circled the fire pit. We would then try like blind people to find firewood in the darkness. Once we felt as though we had enough, someone would start the fire. Smoke would rise up in the darkness like gray ghosts reaching for the sky. The air around us would fill with the scent of burning wood.

Slowly faces would appear in the firelight. Then I would hear the cracking sound of someone opening a beer. I would then open one of my own and drink feeling the cold, fizzy liquid pour down my throat. Now everyone would relax. We would find a seat, either on the cold, damp ground or on a cold, hard rock. We would talk about stuff going on in our lives or sing songs that we loved. I would always look up at the sky. The stars always looked so beautiful. I also loved how everyone looked in the firelight. People all around would be smiling and laughing. Boyfriends and girlfriends would cuddle by the fire.

As the night went on I remember it would always get very cold. My sweater would keep my arms and body warm, but my hands and feet would get cold. I would put them close to the hot fire. The heat would warm my cold limbs. The warmth would give me a very happy and cozy feeling. I would almost start to get sleepy.

Then time would quickly pass and it would be late, time to pack things up and go home. First, before leaving we would put the fire out. We would pour the leftover beer onto the fire causing it to sizzle and pop. Smoke would fill the air, stinging our eyes and filling our lungs with harsh, burning air, always causing us to cough. When we were sure the fire was out we would prepare to leave.

We were all a little drunk at this time. The trail would be a lot more difficult to walk on. The darkness seemed to swallow us up causing us to stumble and fall onto each other.

Most of the time we would lose our way at least once. Using our hands to feel our way and the little light we had from the moon we would find our way back to the trail. Someone would fall and start laughing sending their voices echoing through the dark trees. The smell of smoke and beer would fill the air around us. Then through the trees we would see the soft, silver moonlight reflecting off the damp grass in the field.

Standing in the field we would say our good-byes and go our separate ways. My feet would once again get cold and wet from walking across the damp grass. The road home would be lit up by the yellow glow of the street lamps. Everything seemed so peaceful on these walks home. I used to imagine that I was the only person awake. Then in the distance a dog would bark, causing me to jump. I would then become aware that I was alone and get a little nervous. A few times I would get that creepy feeling like I was being followed. I would check over my shoulder and sigh with relief when nobody was there. The feeling always caused me to run the rest of the way home. My lungs would burn from the cold air and from breathing so hard.

Then I would see home, the porch light glowing as if it were a tiny yellow sun in the middle of my porch. I would see a light on in the living room. I knew no one was home; my mom always stayed out late on the weekends. Walking through the front felt safe and warm. I made it. I would change out of my dirty, smoky clothes and shower, then climb into my soft, warm bed and fall into a deep, dark, peaceful sleep.

Having fires in the Bradford College field is one of my favorite memories. I would never do that again because that chapter in my life is closed. I am no longer sixteen years old. I do not believe it would be as much fun. Now when I feel like having a drink with some friends we go out to a bar instead of trespassing. I'm now more concerned with college and trying to get a degree. I'm also not in contact with half the people that I went there with. About half way through high school I changed schools and met new people. We all just seemed to grow apart after that. I'm really happy that I have all these great memories. Sometimes I wonder if there is a new group of lost teenagers enjoying it there as much as my friends and I did. I really hope so.

Sarah, 23, lives in Haverhill, MA, and works as a childcare provider. With her degree from NECC, she wants to become a kindergarten teacher. Sarah says she was a little bit nervous about writing before taking Basic Writing with Margaret Bergeron in the fall 2002 semester. Thanks to Margaret and Joe Welch in the Writing Center, Sarah says she now feels much better about writing, and it has become something she enjoys.

A Room Over Time
by Pamela O'Brien

After a long day, I can feel my body start to relax as I enter a room that over time has been made to make me happy and comfortable. It is a room that is surrounded by a collection of furniture, painstakingly made and created to our lifestyle, such as a table that has been stripped, stained and stenciled. There is also a shelf made of oak, the handiwork of my husband, and on it sits various pieces of collectibles that change with each season. This family room is the center of our home and my favorite room of all.

A hearth sits in the corner of the room; it happens to be a formation of uneven gray cobblestone. Hanging on the hearth is a tin heart that bears a scene of winter that was given by a close friend and will always remain a true treasure. A soapstone stove made of black and gray tiles rests upon the hearth; when lit the air is filled with a scent of a campfire. The sound of crackling logs reminds me of popcorn being popped on a stove. There are ashes scattered about, telltale signs of its use. The glass front that was once shiny and clear is now dull with black soot and a horizontal crack has now appeared. I have decided that it has added character to the stove and reminds me of the many times the warmth it has provided me. Beside the hearth is a large basket made of grapevine; this has become a bed for our female cat. She had claimed it as a kitten and now can barely fit. When the fire is lit, she settles down upon a pillow that was provided for her comfort and looks like a baby that has been put down for a nap.

A coffee table sits in the middle of the room, magazines defining each of our interests: Good Housekeeping for myself, Handyman for my husband and Rolling Stone for my son. Crumbs from cookies and various snacks are also scattered about. Two red, blue, and cream plaid couches flank the coffee table in an L shape. We each have our own section and it seems that over time our bodies became accustomed to a certain spot. Red and blue pillows of different sizes lay haphazardly on each end. Some are round and smooth like satin, and others are square with a corduroy covering. I prefer the square ones; they support me as I lazily lean to one side. The television is encased in a rectangular wooden cabinet. On top of the cabinet candles remain stationed. When lit they scent the air. Some days I prefer the smell of pine and on others the smell of cinnamon. I look forward to the evenings when I finally can claim the remote all to myself. Depending on my mood I cook with Emeril or redo a room on Home & Garden.

The walls painted off-white in this area are adorned with a special painting of a man and woman dancing. Similar colors of the room reflect the background. The painting is a reprint in fact of the artist Renoir that I saw at a museum. There is a dried flower arrangement in a green basket, a decorative red and cream painted pegboard that holds a different sort of ornament that changes over time. There are also hand-painted sceneries of small towns placed carefully about.

Various braided scatter rugs are set about the room, each one protecting the wood floor beneath. I gaze upon the unprotected wood, uneven scratches in all different directions made by the many shoes that have crossed the threshold. I smile, for each scratch stands for the many family and friends that have gathered here for special occasions.

A sofa table stands in this very special corner of the room and is the oldest of all; upon it, time stands still. Our smiling son, who is turning into a fine young man, is getting ready to make plans for college but is still my baby. A daughter on her wedding day is

dancing with her father. Two small grandchildren, a boy and a girl, are happily standing side by side. There are sisters and brothers, nieces and nephews, aunts and uncles, some of whom live near and some who are dearly departed. My husband is a little boy in black and white; with him stand his sister, mother and father, a man I have never met yet I feel I know.

Beyond the table separated by a half wall is an area of complete enjoyment. A long green and red tiled bar with oak stools and plenty of anything that has to do with sports are placed about. That area is mostly my husband's domain that I get to clean. The walls are littered with golf ball racks, antique clubs, pictures of golf courses and other sport paraphernalia that have been collected throughout the years. A small wine rack hangs below a row of cabinets that are filled with spirits and glasses for any kind of refreshment. We have entertained here on so many occasions that people have claimed it has the feel of a sports pub and it is aptly named "The Nineteenth Hole."

I am standing in my kitchen that overlooks this room. I remember the many changes that have been made to this family room over the years. I feel contented knowing that our family and friends surround us each day, and that we have made this the heart of our home.

Pam took Basic Writing with Mary O'Neil in the spring of 2003. Married with one child, she enjoys golfing and cooking in her spare time, and is studying to become a teacher. While she already enjoyed writing before taking Basic Writing, Pam feels that the class helped her define the process.

My Best Friend
by David Chiasson

Kathy, my wife, has so many great qualities; perhaps the most important would be her love, and affection, which she is never short on showing. She has always put me in front of her own wants and needs. I had a near fatal accident almost two years ago, and I couldn't manage to take care of myself. Kathy managed to hold down a full time job, look after my every need, and managed to take care of all the daily chores around the house, without one complaint. That took a toll on her, but she said, "I did it because I love you."

I admire her for her willingness to help people less fortunate than herself. Kathy has done several walks to donate for cancer research. There is also an organization called Our Neighbors' Table that helps feed families at times of need, to put food on the table. She donates time there when she can. I can remember one night she had come home from Our Neighbors' Table. She told me it was a sad place to be that night. There were whole families there that needed help. Normally you would expect just homeless people there. She told me that is what makes it so sad. Here you have families that are in the poverty level trying to feed their families.

She also happens to be very intelligent, and has a thirst for knowledge that is never ending. Even though she is very established in her career, she is always looking for an opportunity to go to a seminar, or take a class here or there to expand her knowledge. "It makes me more marketable," she tells me.

While at work she is very dedicated to her job and the duties that are assigned to her. She is a purchasing manager by trade, but her real love for work is in the computer field. One day down the road she hopes to go into computers for a career change. After I am finished with my school, she said she wants to take a few computer classes. While at work she does have to dress pretty nice. She really enjoys looking her best. It gives her a feeling of satisfaction.

After a hard day of work, it would not be unusual to see her lounging on the couch in sweat pants and a t-shirt watching one of her favorite sitcoms, Friends. Seeing that the show is on after dinner, you might see the both of us with a bowl of popcorn on our laps, laughing at the show. Kathy really gets a good laugh at Joey. He acts like such an idiot, and he is always good for a chuckle. While at home on the weekend, you would most likely find her in jeans, or shorts, and a t-shirt puttering around the house doing odd jobs.

She enjoys getting all dressed up. Going out for a nice romantic dinner with her best friend, me, is really a special time. It gives us a little time away from the routine of cooking dinner and doing dishes. Her favorite place to go out for dinner is in Hampton Beach, NH, a place called Ron's Landing, on the second floor overlooking the ocean, while having a fantastic meal.

At home the kitchen is where you could find her, creating works of art. What a great cook she is, always trying new recipes and making up her own as she goes along. She likes to cook desserts, but the main courses are what she enjoys cooking the most. When the oven or stove goes on and the meal starts to cook, it makes the whole house fill up with the aroma of the meal. You can see a smile come to her face, and a look of accomplishment. The best meal for her is a roast with mashed potatoes and lots of vegetables on a fall Sunday afternoon.

Kathy loves to go on vacation and explore new parts of the world, as well as parts of this country that she hasn't seen, or would like to see again. We own a timeshare in St. Thomas and we love to go to the Islands, but Kathy loves to trade our time in so we can visit Florida. She says to me it won't cost half as much and there is still plenty we haven't seen down there. She loves it when I am at her side when on vacation; she is like a little kid at times always tugging on my arm to say, "Look at this. Isn't that cool?" When we went to Niagara Falls on September 8, 2000, she was in awe from the beauty and force of the falls. I thought my arm was going to fall off from all the tugging on it.

Standing at 5'5" with her beautiful blue eyes, with dirty blond slightly curly hair at shoulder length, she is very beautiful, and she has a great smile. Although she is slightly overweight, it does not interfere with her beauty in the least bit. She has a great inner beauty to match the outer beauty.

Kathy is my best friend. I am always learning new things about her every day, and that is something I find very satisfying and fulfilling. Perhaps the second most important thing that I have learned from her is patience and understanding. She seems to have an endless supply and it seems to make her a happier person all around, and I strive to have her patience and understanding, and to give her my love freely the way she gives it to me.

David is 39 years old and lives in Newburyport, MA, with his wife, Kathy, who is the subject of his essay. He is interested in a career in drafting. Before he took Aaren Yandrich's Basic Writing class in the fall of 2002, he "had no confidence, and wouldn't write because of that." With the experience he has gained, he says, "I think I will have fun writing from now on."

The Wonderful Character of My Mom
by Laura Concheri

My mom has always had the good fortune of knowing the truth. Her motherly mind machine turns on this switch whenever she senses a lie, and it is then you realize there is no way you are going to get past her. As one would try to figure out a good, believable story line, she will raise her right brow and give you the "Do you think I'm that stupid?" face. Biting her bottom lip and shaking her head, you might as well give up and walk away while you still can. My brother and I have always known not to try to pull a fast one on Mom. She is an exceptionally resistant woman when it comes to what she wants, so there is no point trying to change her mind. And though she is tough in one sense, she also understands. I like to think of her as a mother and a friend – but more of a mother.

Since her first gray hair, she has vowed never to stop coloring her short tresses with her usual Almond # 53, claiming she will not be a part of Mother Nature's wrath. In the same case of not looking aged, she will not exercise to keep fit. She would whine, "Why should I make myself miserable? You can make yourself eat that healthy junk and then run around. I won't." However, there was a time when she did attempt a little aerobics, only to backtrack by eating a Hostess cupcake. I ran up to snatch the little sugar monster from her fingers, only to have her quickly shove the entire thing in her mouth. Her cheeks were overstuffed with cream filling and chocolate cake, then to expose a giant grin as she snickered at my attempt.

Relatives comment always on how she and I are much alike, mostly on the similarities of our physical looks. Mom and I both have the same body shape, slender with a little extra in the legs, and we share the same pale skin and award winning smile. Yet, her upper lip homes this little brown freckle, which my dad suggested comes from all the chocolate she eats. We share the same casual makeup and clothes, which is okay except for the occasional, "Oops! I gave it to the Goodwill. Sorry, hun."

However, I have always figured that we have a greater resemblance in our personalities. Like me, she is an arguer, in the sense that she will not give in at all. She, on the other hand, is much worse. If for a moment she is without a doubt proven wrong at every angle, she'll get mad at you for verifying her mistake. Last month, Mom absolutely wanted the new rug in the living room to be this dark, maroon color, and Dad wanted a simpler color like tan. No one would rest until Mom got her maroon, so that is what was decided on. The outcome became a very disturbing rug that clashes with everything in the room. Of course Mom realized this when it was installed, yet we cannot change it because we will, again, never hear the end of it from her.

Though she is tight fisted about her views, she is remarkably lenient when it comes to what my brother and I can and cannot do. There are times that she knows I'm going to be put in certain situations where I can get into trouble. In the past she was a "wild child" herself, and she knows that she cannot deny a teenager everything they want to encounter in life. When I want to go out, her middle ground is for me to call her every hour, and I won't get into trouble, even if I'm just leaving a message on the machine.

My older brother Scott wanted a party, and Mom said it was okay – just as long as the house was clean when they got back. The party occurred the night before they were to come home, and as luck would have it, a fight – no, a brawl – broke out and all was chaos. The police showed up, the house and yard were completely disheveled, and Scott broke his cheek bone – sending him to the hospital. We did, however, get our part of the deal done and did

have everything cleaned up by the time they got back that very morning. Mom got a good look at Scott's stitched up face, and then at the clean house. She giggled, "Well, think of it this way, Scott – you'll look a bit more rugged to the ladies with a scar on your face."

In the future, my mom will obviously grow old (though we know she'll resist) but never change. She and my dad will be sitting at the table, she arguing that she's right and he not caring anymore. At age 80 she'll still have Almond # 53 as her hair color, even if it is her wig. She will always be my mom, never resisting life's little chocolate calorie creations and borrowing my clothes, though I don't think I'll be wearing hers at that time.

Laura plans to be a high school English teacher. She is 19 and lives in Hampstead, NH, with her parents and brother. Before taking Basic Writing with Luana McCuish in the fall 2002 semester, she only liked writing poetry. Now she says, "I feel I can write anything – especially short stories."

Like No Other
by Donna Herman

I could never imagine a life without my daughter Dyana. For the past seventeen years she has been a friend, and an inspiration. She encompasses the best I could ever desire in a daughter. She is beautiful and bright, loving and caring and likes to have fun. She is always there to help others. There is no one like her.

When you first look at Dyana you notice her eyes. Sometimes they look light blue like the sky in the springtime; other times they are green gray like slate. They are big and very expressive. You can almost see deep down into her thoughts. Dyana will usually have a big bright smile that covers her whole face. It beams with light and laughter. Her shoulder length dirty blond hair is neat and clean and always pulled back into a ponytail. When we are together everyone says we look alike. I think of it as a compliment, but her face gets bright red like a big tomato. Dyana is very tall and thin with very long legs. When she was younger other kids would call her string bean because her legs seemed to keep going. Dyana is in blue jeans and oversized tee shirts most of the time. I think she looks best with a soft skirt that flows down past her knees and a soft lacy sweater that comes to her slim waist. Sometimes, she looks like a model that came right off the page of a magazine.

At times I wish I were more like my daughter because she likes to have fun. One time on our way to Logan Airport in Boston we got stuck on the Tobin Bridge. To help pass the time we started singing to the radio. Dyana had put her window down and was waving to some nice looking boys in the car beside us. Dyana kept on waving until they waved back. Then every car we would pass or pass us she would wave to until they waved back. Sometimes we waved to the same people several times. We had so many people waving and laughing that the trip didn't seem to take as long, even if it still took an hour to get there.

Have you ever gone anywhere with a popular teen? Everywhere you go she knows somebody. One time Dyana and I went to the mall to get a few gifts for someone's birthday.

In the first store we ran into some girls she knew from school. Then we ran into some kids from church. We didn't even get to another store when someone came up to her and gave her a hug. It was the mother of a former boyfriend. Everyone seems to know her.

Like other teenage girls there aren't many things Dyana would rather do than be on the phone or hanging out with friends. When the phone rings you don't have to check who it is for because most of the time it is for Dyana. When you want to use the phone you have to wait until Dyana gets off or you have to find the phone because she has put it down somewhere and you can't find it. When she goes out with friends the first thing that she will ask when she gets home is, "Did anyone call for me?" or "Who called?" She would assume that she was the only one to get any phone calls.

At times she can be very stubborn. I remember when she learned to snowboard. Dyana and a bunch of friends went together to Bradford skiing. Her friend, Rachel, was going to teach her. The day started out great and all were having a lot of fun until it was time to go down the slope. Dyana had only done it once before and her best friend, Amy, never had, so they thought they would learn together. Rachel told them the basics and left them on their own. Dyana didn't have many problems. She had a few falls, but what else would you expect? On the other hand, Amy decided it was too hard. When Amy fell, which was almost immediately, she decided she did not want to get back up. Dyana tried and tried to get Amy to just finish coming down the slope. That's when everyone they had gone with told her to just leave Amy; Dyana refused. It took Dyana about an hour and a half for them to get down. She had to basically carry Amy down the hill. Now that Amy was safely down the hill, Dyana was able to make a few runs by herself. She really enjoyed it, and now she has her own snowboard.

Church is very important to Dyana. I remember the first time Dyana and I went to church. She was about three years old. We lived in Atlanta, Georgia. Dyana started asking about church, "Why don't we go to church?"

I said, "I don't know? Why?"

Dyana said, "I want to go for Easter."

"Ok. Why?"

"I don't know. I just do," she said. Ever since that time Dyana and I have been going to church. She has even gotten some of her friends involved in it.

There are so many things Dyana can do, but cooking is not one of them. When Dyana gets into the kitchen it's like a disaster waiting to happen. I remember one time when she was making cookies she used cornstarch instead of flour. There was another time when she made a cake and she didn't read the directions on the box very carefully. She put one and a quarter cups of water instead of a quarter cup. The cake came out to be chocolate soup. It seems that even when all she has to do is put cookie dough into the oven for a few minutes she ends up forgetting about them and they burn.

Dyana has always been willing to help others. She was even given an award for helping others when she was 13 years old. I was very proud of her. Even now she will do whatever she can to help someone. I remember that not too long ago Dyana loaned her new cell phone to a girl because the girl was very upset and needed to call home. The girl called home and didn't get the answer she was looking for or something and threw Dyana's phone across the girls' bathroom and broke it. When Dyana said something to the girl the girl just said, "So." It still has not been replaced. It makes me happy to know that she is still very compassionate and willing to help others.

In the next few years Dyana will be grown and on her own. I don't know what she will decide to do with her life. I think that she would be a very good teacher or nurse or something like that. She says she wants to be a model or massage therapist maybe even a dental hygienist. Dyana still has time to figure it out. Whether she chooses one of these careers or something else, I know she will enjoy whatever it is.

Dyana was the first person I told when my husband asked me to marry him. I woke her up in the middle of the night. It was about one o'clock in the morning. I sat down at the side of her bed and I said, "George asked me to marry him. I told him yes!"

"When are you going to get married?" asked Dyana.

"I'm not sure; I would like you to be my flower girl," I said.

"Yes," she said. Dyana was almost as excited as I was that night. I ended up sleeping with her in her room.

Dyana is very important to me not only because she is my daughter but because we have been through so very much together. We have learned to be friends as well as mother and daughter. I would like to think that she could come to me with any problem she may have. I am very proud of the beautiful and caring young lady she has become. Even as I look at her and her friends, I know there is no one like her.

Donna is 39 and lives in Lawrence, MA. She is married, and her family includes six children. Now that she has finished Clare Thompson's Basic Writing class, she feels more confident about her writing.

My Love
by Irene Michaud

You know the saying, "First impressions are a lasting one." Well when I first saw Jay riding around my neighborhood on his BMX bike in the summer of 1985, I thought, "Wow! What a knockout! He could be a good boyfriend." I saw before me a handsome 15-year-old. He had brown eyes with lashes that curled inwards and a well-shaved goatee. His hair was styled wavy with a mid neck cut. When I glanced over his right ear, a small white spot went unnoticed, leaving the rest of his hair a dark chocolate color. He weighed approximately 180 pounds, wore Levi's jeans that showed off his cute butt and a tee shirt that was well fitted. I could not help but notice his wide broad shoulders and biceps. Not only did he have the look that I wished for, he had a soft-spoken voice that went well with it. Looking at him made me all tingly inside, like I had butterflies in my stomach.

Jay was the type of kid that liked to show off. I remember the day after I first saw him. He was on his bike trying to impress me by doing stunts on his bike, stunts I never heard of, curb-endos, bunny bounce back and the famous "Front wheel hop with a spin of the handle bar." Little did he know I was paying more attention to his physical appearance than the stunts he was doing. I was not interested in him as a boyfriend at the time; I just liked the way he looked.

It is now 2002. Since then his hairstyle has changed three times. Jay now shaves it for the summer and lets it grow in for the winter. Still being able to see the white spot, I would tease him on occasion about it, saying I added a few white hairs to that spot. His response would be, "A few? More than that sweetie!" Jay also gained a few pounds and wears sweatpants instead of jeans. He says, "They are more comfy." And his tee shirts, let's just say they fit. His voice however is more masculine.

The way Jay and I became a couple is a long story, so here is a short version of it. My parents needed some plumbing work done at their house and I knew that Jay did plumbing for work. Even though I had not seen Jay for several years I gave him a call to see if he would like to come over and give them an estimate. He replied, "Yeah sure." We agreed on a date and time for him to come by. When the night arrived, he was very professional and polite. My father showed Jay where the problem was; Jay gave the pipe a quick look and told them that, "The job can be done now, if necessary."

"Sure, why not?" my father responded. Jay did what was needed and started to pack his tools. My father asked him, "How much do I owe you?"

Jay replied by saying, "Would it be all right if I take Irene out for a date and we call it even?"

My father said, "That is up to Irene, but I do appreciate you asking first." Our first date was on December 17, 1992. I was 22 and Jay was 23 years old. We have been together since then.

To look for Jay you would have to search in three places. Sunday to Thursday he works at Yoplait Colombo; do not disturb him there. Three nights out of the week he is in the computer room at our apartment. Most likely he is playing a Delta Force Army game and if you listen closely you could hear him complain at the same time. On Friday or Saturday nights he is in the basement either listening to his cousin's band "NEX2NUN" play in the "Jam" room or just hanging around with them while having a few beers and talking about the next song they want to record. If after looking in these three places, you still cannot

locate him, try the couch where he likes to take a nap. During the winter try his wood workshop in the basement.

Watching Jay do a project in his workshop is like watching Norm Abram, host of the New Yankee Workshop show. Both are very accurate with measurements and cuts. When you sit back to watch Jay, however, you could see his mouth move just a little bit. Like a four-year-old puckering up for his first kiss, on the odd occasion he needs to stop and think. The expression on his face seems to be a confused one. No need to worry though. When push comes to shove, the pencil will start to tap on the workbench with the music. Next thing you know he is playing the air guitar and drums, singing along with the radio as well. When the song is over he is right back to his project, unless he has not figured out a versatile way of working out the problem. Then he will continue to play along with the radio.

Going out with Jay is like sporadically being with a five-year-old. If we were to go to a department store and walk by the toys, Jay would be very wide eyed and start pulling on my shirt, saying, "Can I have this? Huh could I pleeeaaassse?" pointing to any toy close at hand. He does not care if people are a stone's throw away. As long as he is making me laugh, that is all that matters to him. Jay could get too carried away acting like this, and I would have to be like a mom and tell him to stop or he is grounded.

Jay has a very outgoing attitude. He likes to meet new people and learn how to do new things. It is rare for Jay to get mad, let alone have an attitude. There was this one time when his cousin Kenny came over to see the new car Jay just bought, a 2000 fully loaded Pontiac Grand Am. Kenny was sitting in the car and he accidentally spilled some soda on the seat. Jay just stood there and shrugged his shoulders as if to say, "Oh well, shit happens." Kenny on the other hand was very apologetic and baffled that Jay did not offend him over this because Jay had the car for no more than two hours.

There is no way of knowing what people will say about Jay when they first meet him, but after meeting him for five minutes they all say that, "Jay is a hard worker, patient, caring man and the best guy to have as a friend." It is also said that he is there when needed. When I hear people talk about Jay in this manner, it makes me proud. I always respond with a "Thank you" or "Yes, I do feel blessed to have him by my side."

I have been dating Jay for some time and I always knew that he was a thoughtful guy. I remember the day when Jay called my house. He was letting me know he was on his way over. My mom answered the phone. When she hung the phone up, her eyes were filled with tears. I asked her, "Is everything all right?"

She said, "Yes," with a smile.

"So why the tears?" I asked.

She replied, "Because Jay asked if I needed anything from the store. He would get it for me." No other guy has done that for her. My mother thought it was "sweet and lovely." That was the day she nicknamed him "Sweet Love." To this day my mother still calls him that when he does something for her.

It takes a lot for some men to cry; about seven months ago Jay did a lot of crying. I remember the day when Jay's mother passed away. Her death was an unexpected one. By the look on his face, you could tell part of him left with her. Not only did he lose his mom, he lost his best friend also. Jay knew in spite of this, he had to stay strong for his father. On this day, Jay became more of a man than any guy I know. This was the hardest day of his life to date and I know that he misses her terribly.

We cannot predict the future but we can dream. In Jay's dream he is still working as a supervisor at Yoplait Colombo, he built a log cabin alongside a lake and he is married to me with two kids. Having this dream come true in ten years or less would put Jay at ease. His wishful dream is not to work, have a big yacht and go fishing every day. If he could have both dreams he would be set for life. Like Jay says, "Live one day at a time and things will work out fine."

Jay and I went from childhood crush, to living with each other. For the past nine years it has been up and down, mostly up and still going that way. He has been my best friend and my strength, but most importantly My Love. There is nothing in the world that can make me want to leave him. He has taught me to be strong as a person and to do my best. If I did not have Jay's love and support, I would not be here right now writing this paper.

Irene is now married to Jay, the subject of her essay. She is 32 years old and lives in South Lawrence, MA. She plans to be an administrative assistant. Irene took Basic Writing with Jackie Peña in the fall 2002 semester. She says, "After taking the class my confidence went up and I learned that there is more to writing than putting words on paper."

Curiosity Does Kill the Cat
by Yelitza Bastardo

I'm sure that almost everyone has heard the phrase, "Curiosity killed the cat." I never believed my mother when she used to say that to me. One day I realized that she was right. From a very early age I was very curious, sometimes too curious for my own good. I learned one day that curiosity is not always good and can turn any adventure into a dangerous experience.

It was a really hot day in June of 1994. I was 10 years old at the time. I felt like a big girl. I was with my mother, grandmother, and brother in the car. We were just getting back from a trip to the mall. My mom thought it was a good idea, at least so we could take our minds off the heat. As soon as we got out of the mall and into the car all we had was heat on our minds again. My brother was playing with his Game Boy. I was poking around in the spaces of the seats. I was checking for hidden treasures that might be hiding under the seats.

After I was done poking around I noticed that the car seemed a little too hot. I knew how hot it was outside. It was way hotter inside the car. I was sweating way too much. I had shorts on and a really thin tank top. I knew I should not be this hot. Then I said in my concerned voice, "Mommy the car is way too hot."

She looked into the rearview mirror to look at me and said, "Sweetie it is hot everywhere. Wait till we get home. You'll feel better." I still knew that the car was way too hot and it wasn't just the weather. My mom parked the car right under the pine trees. The trees made a nice shade area for the car. When we piled out of our car my mom noticed that from the car's hood there seemed to be steam rising from it. Before she let us all into our condo she told us to wait that she was going to check out the car. When she popped the hood all you could see was the steam or smoke rising from the car. I ran up to my mom and started singing the "I told you so" song. My mom was trying to see where she could put water in the car so it would cool down. I knew my mom had little or no knowledge about overheated cars. Nevertheless, she went ahead hunting around for some knob that would say water on it. My grandmother was sitting on the steps complaining to my mom as always. "Hun I know you're concerned about the car but it's too hot to be sitting out here. You should wait till your husband comes home," she said.

Nearby, my brother and I were playing with a little piece of chalk that we found on the pavement. After it ran out we started throwing little sticks and little pellets of sand. The pellets would explode once it came in contact with our body. This was not the big girl me, but I was bored. I wasn't really interested in looking under the hood of the car. After seeing my mom for a few minutes poking and examining things in the car a spark of curiosity and interest aroused. I had a strong urge to take a look under the hood of the car. I kind of made my way up there without my mom noticing that I was close to the car. At this point my mom was still looking under the car and trying to read all the labels.

I took a peek at the engine. It was black and smoky all over. There were different colored cables and lids to open and things to touch. It all looked so interesting. I could hear a clicking sound coming from the engine. It was the same sound a clock makes only way louder. I could feel the heat wave against my skin. As I put my head further in the air was not breathable. The air was thick and really hot. As I went to touch one of the dirty cables my mom freaked out. She said, "Sweetie, no, get away from the car. Cars are for boys. You'll get dirty." I stepped back and made it seem that I wasn't very interested in looking at the car

again. Inside I was itching all over to see the inside of the car again. I didn't even get to see everything. I was feeling that my mom was being unfair and selfish. She wanted to keep the interesting things all to herself.

So I again made the attempt to get near the car. My mom was busy trying to figure out what it said on the lid of something. I thought, "Great I have an excuse. I can read what it says on the lid and I can be helpful and at the same time I can take a longer look at the car and touch things." I started to read what the lid said. It said, "Under extreme heat. Do not attempt to open." My mom not understanding English decided that that is where the water was to go. I had my face pretty close to the lid. I was looking at something else. I did not notice that my mom was going to open the lid. I knew what the lid meant. I wouldn't be that close to the car if I knew that my mom was going to open it. What happened next happened fast and without warning.

My mom turned the knob slightly and the pressure from under it blew the top off. The wave of green scorching liquid exploded from the car and into my mouth and face. I could feel very little liquid in my mouth but it was there. As I staggered back I heard my mom screaming and panicking. I was in a black world of pain. My face felt like it was on fire. I felt like I had stuck my face in boiling water, but even when I took my face out I still felt my skin searing. I finally felt arms around me. It was my grandmother. I started rubbing my face on her shirt thinking that the pain would rub away. I only made the burning sensation turn into a sensation that was like five hundred needles poking my face. As I was rubbing my face I was rubbing the layers of skin off my face, leaving the raw skin exposed to the air.

Still I was in darkness. I had not made an attempt to open my eyes. My mom screamed, "Can you see? Can you see?" I opened my eyes. It was all a blur of colors. I blinked several times and still nothing seemed to come into focus. My mother's friend drove me to the emergency room. The doctors flushed my eyes out with tons of water and liquids. My vision started to get better and I could see things more clearly. I told my mom, "Mom don't cry. I can see. I'm not blind. It'll be ok." I was tired. My body had been overworked. My body went into panic overdrive and now it was pooped. I had really bad burns all on the right side and a little of the left side of my face. I had also ingested a tiny bit of antifreeze. The doctors said not to worry because it was very little. I had spat most of it out. As I sat on the hospital bed I kept thinking of when my mom was screaming, "She can't see! She can't see!" It freaked me out just thinking about it.

To this day I'm scared of hot oils, pans, and ever looking under the hood of cars. The thing I fear the most is losing my vision. From the day of the accident to this day, I learned to appreciate the small simple things in life we take for granted. We never know how important it is to us until that one fateful day that we come dangerously close to losing it.

Yelitza is 20 years old and a radiology major at NECC. She lives in Salem, NH, with her parents and younger brother. When Yelitza started Clare Thompson's Basic Writing class in the spring 2003 semester, she felt that she was a weak writer. She has gained confidence, and now has "a strong grasp on how to start and finish papers well."

The Decision
by Felix Gonzalez
In Memory of Jonathan

It was February 16, 1989, one of the best weeks of the year. The sun was shining and it was school vacation, which meant running around the house in my Superman underwear and watching cartoons for seven days. With the snow dissolving and birds chirping, I could just smell the flowers of spring around the corner.

I woke up early that morning so I could watch my favorite cartoon, The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, before my big brother Jorgie got up and beat me up for the T.V. I was an eight-year-old crime fighting ninja and my brother was a bigger, older G.I. Joe soldier who would say, "If you cry to Daddy I will get you when he goes to work." Everyone who has an older brother knows that you have only two choices, which are to give up whatever it is he wants or run for your life. I only ran once because I totally forgot that we sleep in the same room, and I had to go to sleep sometime. I guess these were my typical mornings.

After a full morning of cartoons and eating Lucky Charms we decided to go outside and play in the snow. When I took a step into the yard, my brother didn't waste any time and he tackled me to the ground. I knew from past incidents that I couldn't wrestle him down so I just threw snowballs at him and ran. Then, I got tired of running and went to go get some reinforcements. I got my friend Jonathan who lived on the first floor of my apartment building to even things up. My friend Jonathan was a weak, skinny kid that even the wind could push over, but I used him as a decoy to sneak up behind my brother Jorgie and it always worked. My brother got tired of being double teamed, so we decided to go to the Lawrence Boys Club.

I said, "When we get there we are playing kickball."

Jonathan replied, "No way – we are playing dodgeball."

I then replied, "Let's play something different. Every time we go to the Boys Club we play dodgeball."

My brother Jorgie answered, "Forget about the Boys Club then and let's go play around the river."

Jonathan and I replied, "That settles that argument; let's go."

We only lived four houses down from the Boys Club so our parents let us walk there as long as we stayed together. Our house was on Water Street and the Merrimack River was right behind it. This day was not the first day that we went to the riverbank to play, but it was the first day we decided to try something we never did. We never guessed we would regret it for the rest of our lives.

While my brother and I ran upstairs to lie to our mother about going to the Boys Club, Jonathan was doing the same thing downstairs to his mom. We knew that our parents trusted us and we took advantage of it whenever we could. After getting permission to go, we met in front of the house and started to walk towards the Boys Club. As soon as we got out of sight from our house we took a left down a side street. At the end of the street there was a fence with a hole that we climbed through to get to the riverbank.

When we got there we did our usual skipping of rocks over the water to see who can throw their rock the farthest. There's not much to do on a riverbank, but we would

always come up with something. This day we decided to go on the ice and see how strong it was. My brother Jorgie was the first one on the ice. He said, "Come on and stop being wimps."

Jonathan replied, "I'm not no wimp," and got on the patch of ice.

They were walking around on the ice trying to show me that it was safe but I was too scared to go on. After ten minutes of being called a wimp and a chicken I stepped onto the ice just to step right back off.

I said, "Forget it! You guys can call me a wimp all you want, but I still won't get on the ice."

Then within seconds that fun day at the riverbank turned into the scariest day of our lives. My brother and Jonathan were having so much fun on the ice they didn't even see or feel the patch of ice moving. By the time they noticed, it was too late because they were too far from the riverbank to jump off. I tried to reach a branch to them but they were too far away to grab it. I had no choice but to run for help.

As I ran through the woods crying, I was tripping over rocks and getting slapped in the face by tree branches. The only thing I can picture is the fear and the tears that I saw on their faces as they floated farther away from the riverbank. My heart was beating so hard and I was so scared. Not even getting hit by a car would have stopped me from running. When I reached the hole in the fence I ran down the street feeling like I was gasping for my last breath and ready to drop dead. As I approached my house I saw Jonathan's aunt on the porch and ran up to her out of breath and crying.

She said, "Felix, what's wrong?"

I just stood there staring at her for ten seconds in shock. She had to shake me with both hands to get me to talk.

I then screamed, "My brother and Jonathan are drowning in the river!"

She ran inside and told her grandmother to call the fire department and came back outside to talk to me.

Jonathan's aunt said, "Felix, you need to show me where they are!"

I was crying and trembling with fear and replied, "Lisette, I am too scared to go back there."

Lisette answered, "We need to go help them before they get hurt."

I didn't want my brother and Jonathan to get hurt so I went back with Lisette to see if we could find them. When we got there we found my brother Jorgie laying all wet on the riverbank and he was unconscious. We looked everywhere for Jonathan, but he was nowhere to be found. His aunt was crying, yelling out his name, and feeling so helpless. I tried to help her yell for him but my whole body was shaking and every word that came out was just a mumble.

By the time the fire department got there, my brother Jorgie was fully conscious. He showed them exactly where he went under and told the police what had happened. My brother Jorgie tried putting Jonathan on his back but he slipped off the ice and went under. The scuba divers found Jonathan's purple, bloated, and lifeless body 15 minutes later. He was taken by helicopter to Boston Children's Hospital at 6:50 p.m. and was pronounced dead 40 minutes later. Jonathan was never baptized so they had a priest come in and baptize him in the unspoken and depressing hospital room before he went on his journey with God.

I did not attend my friend Jonathan's funeral because I could not handle picturing him lying in a coffin and not running around playing dodgeball. Also, I had a feeling of guilt because I argued with him about playing dodgeball that day. To this day I wish that I agreed with him and went to the Boys Club or at least had the time to say I'm sorry. I know on that day we all wanted and agreed to go play at the river. It is just that I wish I could have done more to save my friend. Every winter I stop by the Merrimack River and when I look at the frozen ice I sometimes see Jonathan's reflection smiling back at me.

Felix, 21, lives in Lawrence, MA, and is a security guard for Northeast Security. He is majoring in criminal justice here at NECC, with the goal of becoming a police officer in the future. Before taking Basic Writing with Mary O'Neil in the fall of 2002, he "didn't even know what writing was about." Now he says that writing has given him another hobby, as well as a way to truly express his feelings.

An Unusual Day of Vacation
by Gyöngyvèr Màrdirosz

On December 21, 1989 my brother and I were spending our winter vacation at our grandparents' house in Madefalva, Romania. My brother was 10 and I was 11 years old. It was the beginning of the winter break so I really enjoyed it by playing all sorts of games with my brother. We did not know that this day will be written in the history books and will change the whole country's life.

Christmas was getting closer and we were just happy that the school was over and that we had nothing else to worry about because we were children. For Christmas we usually got a pair of socks or scarf that our grandmothers had knitted for us and one or two kilograms of oranges and that was a very big deal then. We were always very excited about Christmas in spite of the fact that our presents were poor. We were delighted with every little thing we got, the way that children nowadays are for a bicycle or other expensive toys. We were waiting for Christmas for its peaceful and cheerful mood because this was our biggest religious feast.

I remember it was a clear but cold winter day. It was after lunch at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when my grandfather wanted to listen to the usual daily news on the radio. My brother and I were happy that we did not have anything to do; with our full belly we started to play one of our favorite games, Chinese checkers.

My grandfather turned on the radio and an unusually loud voice came out: "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are not going to start with the usual international news because we have important local news to share." My brother and I were still very loud clarifying the Chinese checkers rules. "You cannot take that step," I started the argument.

"That is not fair," my brother replied.

"You cannot go backwards; that is the rule!" I tried to convince him.

My grandfather said, "Shush, stay quiet!" I knew that something important must be going on. Suddenly everybody started to listen to the radio. My grandmother was in the kitchen just mixing the cookie dough, but as she heard the radio she came in to the living room close to the radio. As we saw her standing there with her messy hands concentrating on the radio we felt that something big was going on. So my brother and I had calmed down and became very serious about listening to the radio. We heard that in Bucharest the Revolution had exploded and that terrorists were shooting on Bucharest's streets. Hundreds were dead or injured and the dictator Ceausescu and his wife had run away with a helicopter and were hiding but they found them and they had been arrested. My grandmother said, "It was predictable that such a thing would happen after the life we lived through all these years."

"Yes. I knew that something would happen sooner or later," my grandfather replied.

"Let's pray that better days are waiting for us and all is going to end up well," my grandmother said.

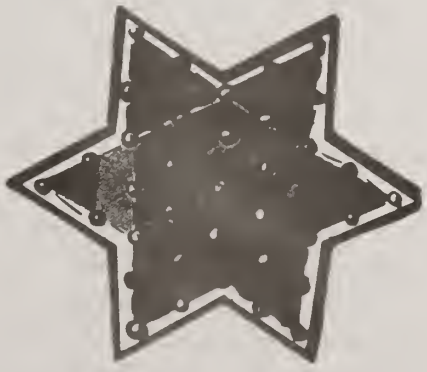
The rest of the day we spent in front of the television or near the radio waiting for the end of this whole situation. My brother and I did not play that day. We were there with the grownups listening to the news and asking questions, like: "What will happen now? Why are they shooting in Bucharest? Who is shooting at whom? Why?"

I was very confused about the things happening around me but even though I was just 11, I felt that this would be the end of Communism and big changes would be done. Something else, a new lifestyle, would come. And this big change would affect my life too. We turned on the television and we saw shocking pictures about what had happened in Bucharest. I was happy that we lived far from the capital and we were safe in a warm house, surrounded by two loving grandparents.

In Communism life was very hard. People were not free to do anything they wanted. They could not practice their religion, children could not be baptized in public, parents needed to stand in long lines for hours to get some milk for their children, and they could not buy anything as much as they wanted—just if they had the "tickets." We did not have hundreds of channels on the television. We had just one channel, and cartoons were just once a week on the weekends. We were not so well informed about the western countries, just what we saw in the movies, but for me as a child it all seemed just a dream. Our parents always did their best for their children. That is why we never felt the huge difference between what we could have and what we really had. As we got older we realized what they had been through, how many sacrifices they made in raising us up.

A few days later everything was all over. The dictator and his wife had been killed; they were shot in the head in a very cruel way. The way Communism had ended was very drastic too. Everybody was hoping that the change would be in a good way but nobody knew it for sure. There was a waiting and hoping period, when people were expecting either good or bad things to come. They were just hoping that it would be better than it was. If I look back now the change came slowly and is still coming. We are still not there where we should be but at least everybody is free. Here I am talking about the freedom to do as one pleases, but not too long ago life in my country wasn't this way.

From this historical event I have learned that nothing is stable, nothing is forever. It is like the weather: one day can be nice, sunny and warm, but the next day it can change to a freezing, rainy and windy day. I believe that I got stronger with all those experiences that I have gotten through the hard time in Communism and even from the Revolution. I can compare now. I know what is bad and what is good, and since then I never said that it could not be worse because I know that it could.



Gyöngyvèr is 23 years old and comes from Miercurea Ciuc, Romania. Before coming to NECC, she had lived in the western United States as well as Chicago, IL. She took Basic Writing in the fall 2002 semester with Brian Kuhl, after which she felt more comfortable with a process that had made her feel afraid. Gyöngyvèr's career goal is to become a physical therapist.

Learning from My Job
by Lisa Hubley

A few days before I turned 16 years old I was set up for my first real job. My older sister, Rachael, had been working at Friendly's for a few years. She was an awesome waitress there and was well known. She told her manager, Lisa, that I was going to be 16 soon, and Lisa said she would hire me. She was hoping I would be as good of a waitress as Rachael was. At the time Lisa and Rachael talked about me working at Friendly's, neither one of them informed me. Rachael just came up to me five days before my birthday and said, "I talked to my manager and she said if you apply she will hire you when you turn 16."

"What?" I said, with a confused look on my face.

She responded, "You complained that you needed a job, so I spoke with my manager and she can't wait for you to start."

"Would you drive me up there to fill out the application?" I said.

She said, "Whenever you are ready."

I was so excited to have a job set up for me. I couldn't wait to start making money. At 16 years old I needed to make money and save it. I was saving up for a car and my license. Then I started thinking of what it was going to be like to be a waitress. I thought it might be hard to work with mean customers. It might be hard to balance a tray. I was nervous I wouldn't have a good enough memory. I also had a hard time talking to people I don't know. That was the main reason I wanted the job, though. I wanted to get more comfortable speaking in front of unfamiliar people. All kinds of horrible thoughts went through my head the first day I worked. I was very nervous.

When I first walked in the door, all of the employees greeted me. I met all kinds of people. There were four dishwashers, eight cooks, eight ice-cream makers, three managers, and 22 waitresses. All of them, at one point, told me their names and they informed me that if I needed any help, to just ask them. I knew there were too many people to remember names, but I did the best I could. When I walked behind the counter, everything was in a place. Plates were in their place behind the grill, ketchup was under the counter, glasses were in racks under the soda machine, and the silverware was all rolled up neatly in a container. Everything had its own place. The floors and walls were clean. For the majority of the time I was working there, everything was usually clean. We also had a break table out back that we could put our stuff on. Employees put their jackets or pocketbooks on this table. The break table was kind of big. What I found extremely surprising was that behind the grill, where the cooks had to cook, was very clean. I didn't think it would be clean because there is so much going on back there at all times. I couldn't believe that the cooks could keep everything clean, even when they were extremely busy. Basically, Friendly's is a very clean, sanitary place to eat.

My first day went by a little easier because my sister was my trainer. I hated training because I had to follow Rachael around all day and watch what she did. I wasn't making any tips either. Well, I wasn't supposed to be anyway. Once in awhile when the manager was out back, Rachael would let me take some tables and keep the tip. I was nervous taking my first few tables because Rachael had to watch me closely to make sure I did everything right. I made a few small mistakes, like not offering salads, but nothing major.

The first customers I waited on, without being watched, were two old women. One of them said to me, "Are you training?"

I said, "Yes," as I noticed my name tag still read "Trainee."

I took their order and everything was going well. When I delivered the food I realized I forgot to bring out the salads. I apologized and we all laughed about it. The ladies were not mad at all. In fact, they left me a tip larger than I expected. They tipped me five dollars on a 20-dollar check. I was so excited.

As a waitress at Friendly's, there are a lot of things that you are responsible for. When the waitress first comes on to a shift she has to have a complete uniform on. This includes black pants, black shoes, a Friendly's shirt, and a nametag. Before she can take any tables, she has to roll up 25 silverware. This means to wrap up forks and knives in a napkin. The waitress has to place the rollups on the table when she takes an order. When you first greet the customers, you have to put silverware on the table. The waitress introduces herself by her first name and tells the customers about the specials. After she takes the order, she brings out the drinks. Then the waitress rings in the food. This is done by computer.

You punch in your order and it gets transferred to the cooks. The waitress then has to wait for the food to cook. When the food is done cooking the waitress delivers the food. After two minutes of the customer eating the food, she has to go back and make sure everything is cooked to the customer's liking. When the customer is done eating the waitress clears the plates off the table and offers dessert. After the desserts are delivered the waitress brings out the check. She is then responsible to take the customer's money and wish them a happy day. At the end of her shift she has to do side work. Side work is just basically stocking things for the next set of waitresses. Side work was the worst thing ever. It was bad because at the end of your shift you were tired and wanted to go home. Side work caused you to be at work for a half hour after your shift. It had to be done though. If side work wasn't done, the next people coming in would be mad and unprepared for customers.

Everyone that worked there was really nice. All the waitresses were really nice. We all had our bad days though. Rachael is my sister so she and I got along really well. Working with her brought us a little bit closer, I think. The dishwashers, cooks, and ice-cream makers did not talk very much. I did not get to know any of them very well. The manager, Lisa, was awesome. She talked with us like we were her own children. She was understanding and very helpful. She was more of a friend than a boss to everyone. Sometimes she would give us advice about our boyfriends or outside life.

There aren't usually too many bad days at Friendly's. I never had any. Sometimes you will wait on a customer that isn't happy, but I always managed to keep them happy. That's what makes me a good waitress. One of my days there was a lot better than other days. I had two heavy set men come in and sit at my table. I waited on them and everything went well. When I delivered their check they gave me 200 dollars and told me to keep the change. The check was only 75 dollars. I said to them, "Come back soon and ask for me to be your waitress." I said it as a joke because they left me so much money.

One of the men said to me, "We were very happy with the service here. The reason we tip so well is because you didn't stare at us. We are fat gay men and it makes us uncomfortable when people stare at us."

"As far as I am concerned, all of us are different. If everyone in the world was skinny and straight, the world would be boring," I said. The men laughed. When they left, I went to clean the table and there was another 50 dollars on the table. They loved me.

As a waitress, I have had to force myself to talk to people I don't know. I have always been a very shy person, so this was hard for me. I realized that I probably could be a waitress without talking, but the tips get better if I am more interactive. So, I talked and became extra friendly with the customers. I learned what to say or do to make a customer happy. With my words I could keep any customer in a good mood.

I had to work every day at balancing. I had to balance my drinks and salads on a tray. That wasn't the hard part. The hard part was taking the items off without letting the other ones fall off. We were told we could not set the tray down. We had to hold it up while taking all the items off. I dropped the tray a few times, but it only helped me to prepare for the next trip.

I used to think that I was the most uncoordinated person in the world. I couldn't think if there was too much noise. I had a bad memory. I also couldn't balance things. Little did I know these things are requirements for waitresses. It took me a month or two, but I worked at these things and got better.

I have learned and improved myself by working as a waitress. I can start conversations with people I don't know without a problem. I have improved my coordination skills a lot. I can also fix almost any problem and keep people happy. The most important of these all is that I can speak with people I don't know. That is going to help me be more comfortable in the future when I have to speak in interviews. I learned a lot from this job and I hope to learn more.

Lisa is 18 years old, and she lives in Haverhill, MA, with her mother and two sisters. She is working toward a career in accounting. In Joanna Fortna's fall 2002 Basic Writing class, Lisa learned to focus better on her topics.

The Ice-Cream Girl
by Katherine Liranzo

My first job ever was working with my dad in his ice-cream truck in NY. I was an ice-cream girl at the age of 12 and I enjoyed it because working with my dad was really easy. I usually worked during the summer time because of school and if I did work during school time it would be on the weekends. This job wasn't hard at all and rather than that it was fun.

My father sold ice cream in the Bronx where he had a specific route just like the other ice-cream vendors. My dad and I lived in Manhattan so we had to leave the house at about 10:00 a.m. to arrive at the ice-cream company at about 11:00 a.m. but my dad had his car so we got there before that time. The company was where all the ice-cream vendors parked their trucks and where they bought the ice cream and candy that they were going to sell that day. The company was like a big parking lot with a store. This place was where everyone met up in the morning and in the evening. Some of the ice-cream vendors had rented trucks but my dad had his own.

The first day that I worked with my dad I was really nervous because I didn't know anyone there and I was also very shy. Some of my dad's friends used to take their kids also but they were mostly boys and on top of that they were older than me. After a while I started to loosen up a little and I would talk with them but I stayed in the truck most of the time waiting for my dad to finish what he was doing.

When we got to the company the first thing that my dad did was to start cleaning up the truck. That was usually my job while my dad went over the list of things that he needed to buy for the day. I liked washing the truck because I was able to use the water hose and always wet myself. I would wash the inside and the outside of the truck; I then had to dry the floor with a mop that my dad had and dry the freezer with a towel. After I was done washing the truck I helped my dad organize all the ice cream, candy and chips. After all this was done we were ready to go.

My dad started his route at around 11:45 a.m. Each ice-cream vendor had a route so that there wouldn't be too many trucks in the same place. My dad sold Good Humor ice cream and there was always a Mr. Softee around but that wasn't a problem because not everyone liked the same thing and we still sold a lot. The beginning of the day was usually boring since it was still early but it didn't take long for the day to get started.

My job was really easy because I just had to ask the customers what they wanted and charge them for it. I wasn't really good with the math so my dad had to help me when I was giving people their change so that I wouldn't give them more or less than what I was supposed to.

At first I used to get confused because I would forget what freezer each ice cream was in but it didn't take me long to figure it out. I was the one who was usually working while my dad drove the truck and he helped me when I didn't know something but when there were a lot of people we would both attend the customers.

I was sometimes shy to sell ice cream to some people but since we were always in the same neighborhood we already knew most of the people and what they usually bought and this made it much easier for me. One of the reasons for my shyness was because some of the boys that were around there would tell my dad that they liked me; they were so pathetic but it was funny and it made me blush sometimes (if they were

cute). Once one of them asked my dad, "Hey Mr. can I go out with your daughter?" and my dad just laughed in his face; he then looked at me and I rolled my eyes.

I liked working with my dad but I didn't always have fun. There were days when I just wanted to stay home but my dad wouldn't let me or sometimes I just had a bad day at work. One of the worst days that I had while I was working was the day that I got hit with an apple. We had stopped at a house and I happened to be sitting by the window when all of a sudden this apple came from out of nowhere and hit me in the face. The kids that threw the apple were by the house where we had stopped but we weren't able to see who they were because they ran as fast as they could. I was so mad that I didn't even bother to keep working that day; I just sat in the back of the truck where my dad had a chair.

The fun part about working with my dad was being able to eat all the ice cream I wanted. I ate ice cream 24/7 and I never got tired of it; I just loved it. I think that I ate more than what I sold sometimes. Even though my dad bought me food when I got hungry, I would always eat all the junk food first because being around it made me hungry all the time or at least that was my excuse.

By the end of the night, I was tired and ready to go to sleep. We usually finished the route at around 11:30 p.m. but when we got to the company I had to wait until my dad counted his money and made his list for the next day. I would take home ice cream for my grandmother and candy for me to take to school and to give to my friends at lunch and for myself of course. By the time we got home it was about 12:30 a.m. and I went straight to bed.

Every day was pretty much the same at the ice-cream company; there was never anything unusual going on. The only time that I was able to see something different was on the fourth of July because every year they had a party. This party was held at the company at the end of the night when everyone had finished their route. The first time I attended one of these parties I wanted to leave because I didn't know anyone and my dad was with all his friends drinking. The second time I went to the party I had more fun because I had already made friends and I didn't get bored. The only fun thing about this party was the fireworks and the fact that we were able to run around the whole parking lot; we played hide and seek and other games to have our own little fun. This was probably one of the greatest days I ever had while working with my dad.

When it started to get cold, my dad stopped selling ice cream; he would take everything out of the truck and bring it home. He usually tried to sell the most he could so that there wouldn't be a lot of things left over and whatever was left he would bring home. By the end of the summer my house looked like the ice-cream truck with all the candy and ice cream. Once I took all the M&M's and Skittles to school to sell them because they were too much. I actually sold all of them but after they were finished I had people asking me for them.

Working with my dad was a fun yet important experience in my life. Some of the personality traits I learned were to have more patience with people and give them better customer service. I also improved in math a little since I was always dealing with numbers when I had to charge people or give them change back. This job also helped me lose my shyness; at the end I wasn't as shy as I was when I first started. My dad wanted me to see what it was like to work and how he earned his money. He wanted me to see how difficult life could be when you don't finish school because you don't have many

job opportunities. I learned to appreciate more some of the things that my father gave me because I knew that he worked hard for them. I definitely learned about the hardship of life and the importance of education even though I was very young.

Katherine is an accounting major. Before she took Basic Writing with Jackie Peña in the fall semester of 2002, she didn't like writing much, but now she feels more comfortable with it. Katherine is 18 and lives in Lawrence, MA.

Fitting In
by Leroy Montañez

I have a different aspect as to what hard work is, and it's all due to my apprenticeship I served at Climate Design Systems. This company is out of Haverhill and has two offices, one for the commercial work and the other is for residential heating. I had the opportunity to be employed there because of my high school co-op program. I worked there as an apprentice pipe fitter and was employed for 10 months. I was 17 years young, still in high school in my senior year, and owned a car that took me to and from school and work. I had an insurance bill to take care of monthly as well as a couple of other payments, and this job helped me with all of that.

It was in May when it was my first day of work. I reported to the boss and he is a master plumber by the name of Mike House. He had told me a little bit of what I was going to do during my employment there, what tools were needed, and what was expected from me as an apprentice. I was then paired with a younger guy named CJ who was the site supervisor and held a lot of responsibilities. His position was second in command, and he took care of everyone's needs for a job. I had worked with him for my first two months there and he had showed me all the basics for me to learn and apply them when I took on a job by myself. The basics included soldering, getting measurements, knowing the names of at least hundreds of different fittings, and knowing how certain tools operate. I realized right off the bat that I really had to earn my money with this gig and I was all up for it.

There were a lot of complicated tasks at work. I used to think that most of what went on I would never learn how to do. Everything that needed to be completed went through a process. First all the stock or materials had to be present and on the job site. If anything ran out the foreman would have to go to the supply store and restock. The job site was usually a commercial building that was in the process of being completed. Electricians, laborers, and plumbers were on the project alongside with us, the pipe fitters and duct guys. Second the workers had to be at work and on time ready to go at it. Once it was seven o'clock you could hear the hammer drills, table saws, core machines, hammers and torches that were on or being used by the workers throughout the job site. The last part is the finish work, but for guys like me who just started, I wouldn't be around for the finish product. The apprentices like me and about five others would often be moved around to different job sites or wherever help was needed. This line of work can be considered difficult if you are not sure about simple things like measurement, but if you know your basics everything should flow smoothly.

During my employment with this company I took on many tasks by myself once I learned the basics. Most of the jobs I did were usually tying in baseboard, cabinet unit heaters, convector units, vav boxes, and coming off the mains with a valve setup. Those are the basic heating units that are disbursed throughout the building. Those units are either hung in the air before the finish ceiling is in place, or on the floor between the finish walls. Most of what had to be installed must be in and tested before a certain date. This meant that my work usually had to be done in a timely manner and could not be an all day fiasco. The work must also function correctly, and had to be completed by code. Most of the time I followed this out and every time I received an assignment from the foremen I would complete it. Sometimes I would get injured during a task because often

it involved pointing a torch in an angle that you can't see where it is. I can say that I suffered a few minor burns, but nothing serious enough to be rushed to hospital.

I can remember one time when I was working at Bentley College with my supervisor CJ; he had decided to put my skills to the test. "All right Leroy, this morning you are going to tie in three vav boxes before lunch time," my boss told me.

"That's only two and a half hours to finish. Yea sure I can do that," I told CJ with confidence. I don't know who I was lying to at that moment, but I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me to be completed. While I stared at the boxes, which were hung up in the air at least 10 feet, I started a list of all my stock needed to complete the task. By doing so I wouldn't forget any of my necessities. Then I gathered all my tools and started my task. Completing one vav box would take at least 45 minutes each, which gave me enough time. The outlets to tie in the piping were on one side and a set of valves would be included. That day I worked really hard to complete my duty correctly and in a timely manner. I finished my assignment, and my boss came around at lunch time to inspect the work. "From what I can see everything is in order, but we'll have to wait until it's pressure tested to find out how good your soldering is," CJ told me with a satisfied look on his face. That task had certainly put my skills in perspective to my boss, because I had worked with a time limit, and it had to be done correctly. That day I was proud of my work, because it received no complaints from the big guy himself. I was working under pressure, and that's how my job went almost every day.

There were many tasks that I had completed in a similar scenario at different job sites. Being at the shop on time was just as important as working hard all day. The company didn't have a vehicle for everyone, and the site foremen were the drivers to bring me to work. Most of the jobs were just outside of the Boston area which meant that traffic was always present, and that's why employees had to be at the shop on time. The average time I would leave the shop would be around 6:15 so that we could arrive at the site around 7:00, depending on where it was. Working early was no big deal for me as long as I had a cup of coffee for some pep.

Being an apprentice at this company is the lowest position in the chain of employees, but Climate Design workers always helped each other out. I learned that coworkers can relate because they were in my position before, being green in this field. That's why they had no problem in giving a helping hand to carry something heavy, or pointing out a mistake before it's time for the finish. My everyday duties were not the same depending on who was the foreman I worked for that day. Basically I was to do whatever he assigned for me to do, and it had to be completed. At other times I would work with the foreman on helping him complete a task that would extend for a period of days or weeks. Working as an apprentice was not easy, because you would receive orders for jobs one after the other. I can say that there was no standing around chit chatting, because they truly believed that time is money. A typical working week for me would be 40 or more hard working hours not including travel time.

From my experience at Climate Design I can say that I gained knowledge on how things work out, and not just from that field of work. The same criteria apply in other fields, but on different levels. I learned that being punctual at work pays off, and that goes for school as well as paying bills or anything that pertains to that matter. There are no shortcuts in hard labor; there are only steps to speed up the process. Sometimes when one tries too hard to make something go by faster, it ends up taking double the time. I

have also learned that working hard pays off in the long run because you feel like you have rewarded yourself when you get paid. The initial feeling of satisfaction and being proud was fulfilled when I took on a job and finished on a good note. Another personality trait that I have gained from this job is the motivation to work hard and receive appraisals. That's not just for the superiors you work for, but you also can benefit from having good work ethics. I have found that I can push my body to the limit in order to complete a task, and that would require some type of an inventive mind as well. These three traits are important in this type of field where the employers always have work lined up to be completed one after another. It was a fast paced job and I needed to keep up to an exceptional speed of productivity.

Leroy is 20 years old and a full-time student. He feels that writing is "not as bad as it seems once you get started." He gained valuable writing experience taking Basic Writing with Brian Kuhl in the spring 2003 semester.

The Influence Music Has Awakened in Me
by Sheila Arias

Ever since I was in my mother's belly I have been influenced with the beautiful rhythm of a Latin love song. The sound of a good song makes me feel renewed and full of life. It runs through my body like a waterfall. As I grew older, I found new ways to fulfill my soul. I had found that soundscapes musicals, which have a similar sound to a waltz, had been what I have been looking for all these years. Soundscapes is a music which combines jazz, new wave, classical and a background wind to it. It definitely helps me heal any stress I had during the day. Soundscapes music has inspired me in such a way that it is impossible for me to live without it.

Even though I grew up listening to a very different type of music, soundscapes music is my favorite type of music. This particular music does not have any lyrics, but the instruments played are very calming and full of life. There are a variety of instruments that each artist mixes for that delightful sound. For example, they play the piano, guitar, drums, trumpets and the violin, just to mention a few. The sounds these instruments create are very softly played. It is so full of harmony and sentimental that it is almost impossible for me to not feel it deep in my soul. When I listen to soundscapes music it makes me feel connected to my inner self. This is a feeling I do not get when I listen to any other type of music like merengue or rap.

One of my favorite soundscapes artists is B-Tribs, which stands for the Barcelona Tribe of Soultress. I love the way he combines flamenco with new wave and dance grooves. It almost feels like I am traveling to heaven, especially when I meditate in the afternoon after having a long day of work. The harmony that it brings to my soul is almost unexplainable because now I cannot see myself going through my day without listening to the slow tempo this music brings to my ears. I tend to flow in with the music every time I meditate; it almost feels like I am taken away to a different place. For example, when I listen to a melody that follows an oceanic background, I tend to set my mind into the ocean and kind of follow through the song. While there, I think about having my boyfriend next to me and sharing the beautiful sounds of the ocean. It is a feeling you cannot get when listening to other types of music. That is what makes this music so special and meaningful to my life.

On the other hand, when I feel stressed out about accomplishing a task at home, I turn to my favorite television channel, which is the soundscapes channel on cable. This channel has all different artists playing different types of soundscapes music. These channels are regular radio stations. Some of them might have their song title named something like "Serenity," "Caressed by the Wind," and many song titles that make me think of love and tranquility. Having these music channels at home on cable is an advantage to me, because I do not spend my money on buying CD's anymore. So, I end up saving a lot of money!

When I finally get home from a long day of work and I feel like cleaning my house, I tend to put the soundscapes channel on to help me relax my stressed body and break into action. For instance, if I am doing dishes, which I hate doing, it sets my mind through a different phase, and I end up forgetting about how I do not enjoy doing dishes. That is many of the reasons why I enjoy listening to soundscapes music. Another thing to

mention about soundscapes music is that it really helps me break through my daily habits of not accomplishing much around my house.

In short, the way this music has influenced my life has been incredible. I never thought a simple beat of a piano or guitar would make me feel transformed into this peaceful and full of hope person. There is a quote written by Berthold Auerbach. It states, "Music washes away from our soul the dust of everyday life." I strongly agree with this statement because I have felt like this type of music has washed away the stress, fear and bad memories I have to deal with in my everyday life.

Sheila, who is majoring in computer technology, is 19 and lives in Lawrence, MA. In Maureen Johnson's spring 2003 Basic Writing class, she discovered that "...writing could make you feel free when it comes to expressing your feelings and sharing your thoughts with others."

Beats That Soothe the Mind
by Guillermo Exposito

As my elementary years were coming to an end my friend Jose Martinez had invited a couple of people over his house. As I entered his house I could feel the floor vibrating under my feet. The music was blaring and the bass from the speakers was shaking everything around us. I felt astonished by the lyrics I heard in the distance. As I got closer I heard the rapper singing about everyday life as a minority. It gave me goose bumps throughout my whole body because I could relate to what he was saying. He sang about issues we went through every day, but never spoke of. I quickly asked Jose, "Who's this rapper?"

He replied, "Tupac Shakur. You didn't know?" I didn't know. I sat there in awe! From then on I knew that rap was going to be my favorite kind of music. I had never experienced music that moved me like this before.

The majority of people think rap is crap, but they've been listening to the wrong kind of rap. In some aspects I can agree because there are many rappers in the industry that sing about things that only pertain to them. Some sing about the abundance of money they have, the fast cars and beautiful women, not to mention how the majority of them want to take over the world. How does this pertain to us "normal" people? It doesn't and that's why it's all crap. It gives the wrong impression of what rap is supposed to be. It's not about any of those things. It's about everyday struggles that we poor people endure from the day of our births.

This is the most important reason why I love Tupac Shakur. His music can bewilder a person. He sings with passion and anger. He puts you where he is and makes you feel his pain. It might seem strange, but it's true. "Multiple gunshots fill the block, the fun stops. Niggaz is callin' cops, people shot, nobody stop. I wonder when the world stopped caring last night. Two kids shot while the whole block staring. I will never understand this society…." These are the words that move me from his song "Staring Through My Rearview." When I hear these songs of struggle and pain my muscles tense up and in a weird way it makes me happy. Someone is singing about the same things I went through, if not worse, and that makes me feel good to know I'm not alone. This is what makes rap, rap. The words might seem grammatically wrong, but the words are still powerful and educated in their own way.

The words aren't the only things that get me into the music. The instruments move me as well. Rap music sometimes uses pianos, guitars and sound effects that get me raptured in the moment. In a lot of the songs the instruments are loud, but not so loud that they drown out the artist, which makes the song powerful. It also depends on the song you are listening to because some of the beats have melodies and some have a soft tempo to them, but the majority of it is him explaining his anger towards society and they have a louder tone to them.

Tupac wrote a song "Dear Momma." It was inspiration for those, including myself, who don't have an active father figure growing up. The mother in this song was heavily addicted to drugs, but still managed to make ends meet. It was an emotional song because the son was singing to her his appreciation for all the things that she's done. He even mentions how when the holidays came she made everything ok. He quotes, "Just working with the scraps you was given and Momma made miracles every Thanksgivin'."

This song alone proves that rap isn't always about vulgar language and hatred. It penetrates another level of understanding.

Some may say that rap gets them excited, but it calms me down. There have been many situations where I have jumped into my car and put on a good rap song to relieve my stress. I can clearly remember the time when I was going to get my license. I was extremely nervous until I put on my favorite rap song, "Me Against the World," basically stating the world is a big obstacle course and you have to try to accomplish it. After the song was over my nerves were at ease and I was ready to ace the test. I don't only put rap music on to relax. I also put it on to celebrate. On my eighteenth birthday party I put the music on as loud as it could go and as the guests poured in they felt the celebration in their bones.

Rap music is an art that is underestimated. It's necessary for happiness because without melodies to soothe our souls this world would be a scary place. There is a variety of music in the world today: country, rock, classical, salsa. They all serve the same purpose to make us our happiest when we're happy and saddest when we're sad. No matter what your choice is mine will have to be and always will be rap!

Guillermo is a 19-year-old resident of Lawrence, MA. He is currently majoring in respiratory care. He was a student in Joanna Fortna's spring 2003 Basic Writing course. Before the beginning of the semester, he didn't feel good about writing, but by the end of the semester he felt good about his writing.

The Salsa with Savor (Flavor)
by Katherine Marte

Music is something that comes naturally to my blood. I mean, I'm from a Latin culture in which life moves with the rhythms of music. Latin people are considered noisy – maybe even crazy – because it's difficult for us to feel indifferent to a very lively sound. Even if we try to abstain from it, a part of our body is bound to betray us.

Music wakes in us a mixture of two races, a little part of African and a little part of Indian. The African drums and other instruments are incorporated in our beats. It makes us remember who we are and where we came from in every beat. The Salsa and Merengue are like our second skin. They represent Spanish culture in the world.

Growing up as a Dominican female, the Salsa and the Merengue were engraved in my system. The Merengue is more part of our typical style. Its origin is unknown, but there are some who believe that during the colonial times, when many slaves came to Santo Domingo from other parts of the Caribbean, they brought traditions of dancing to their gods. Other people believe that it was a dance that emulated soldiers who returned from battle with a limp. These traditions make what is today the Merengue, the Latin American dance style. It's very easy to learn how to dance the Merengue. If you listen to the rhythm, your body without doubt will move the hips. The movement of the Merengue is mostly based in the waist and the hips' vertical sway which will make you bend and straighten the knees. The next step is the intricate rotational movements, and there you're dancing Merengue.

On the other hand, the Salsa is more international. The Salsa originated from the Cuban culture and later it immigrated to Puerto Rico where it was introduced to the world. It's very complicated to dance Salsa because it's more technical. In order to dance the Salsa you have to follow some steps and dance as a three beat step pattern in a four beat bar, which both dancers have to match. If one of the dancers gets lost they have to start over. That's why the Salsa requires knowledge.

I like the Merengue, but I love the Salsa. In some aspects I consider it a lucky privilege that I was introduced to as a child something that many people around the country pay for. Artists like Celia Cruz, with the Guaracha (a Cuban dance from which the Salsa evolved) and Tito Puente with the Timbales, were the masters of this new movement in music. Various performers have taken that idea and incorporated their own twist and turn giving our music many different tastes.

I was excited when the movie Dance with Me starring Vanessa Williams and Chayanne was introduced to the public. In that movie, they were professional dancers and wanted to win the Salsa World Championship in Las Vegas. They stressed the delicacy and elegance in which this rhythm is danced. The chemistry of Salsa is contagious and sensual. Many instruments are used to achieve these beats, like cymbals, trombone, saxophone, trumpet, maracas, and drums.

The new generation of salseros, with the advantages of technology, has combined new instruments, such as electronic guitar, and modern recorder studio programs assigned for making special effects to the sounds that make melodies better. I personally like the old Salsas because of their sentimental lyrics, which sometimes can be very sweet and other times very mean. However, they are very appropriate for anyone who wants to express the anger or the happiness to that loved person, for example, "Lady

Laura," by Tito Rojas, which depicts the singer's feelings for his mother. Some of the lyrics are, "Lady Laura, hug me strongly, Lady Laura, tell me a tale Lady Laura..." Hector Labo, with his hit "Periodico De Ayer," which was dedicated to his ex-girlfriend, means that the love he felt for her is like yesterday's newspaper which nobody wants to read. In other words, he forgot her and now she is part of his past.

The way Salsa is spreading around the world is incredible. A few days ago, I went to watch a movie staring Vin Diesel, my favorite actor. I like everything about him. He inspires passions in many women. There was a scene in which he and his wife were in their home and he turned on the radio and danced the Salsa. It was the time when I realized that he was not only as good as I thought before; he became perfect when he danced the Salsa. It might have taken him a lot of time and effort to learn it, but he did it very well. My favorite actor and my favorite music combined in one man.

Actually, music is a great part of everybody's life no matter what race, or ethnic background. Every person grew up knowing some kind of melody containing their family's ancestry. For Dominicans, the Merengue represents our typical culture and Salsa represents the international, but both make us proud of what we are and where we come from. Music is one of the most beautiful arts we can offer to other countries, especially the Salsa which has raised our Latin name around the World. Viva la musica.

Katherine is a 21-year-old resident of Lawrence, MA. Currently, she is majoring in business management. Katherine was a student in Joanna Fortna's Basic Writing course in the spring 2003 semester. Before taking Basic Writing, Katherine says, "I thought that writing wasn't for me. Besides my writing errors, I thought, 'What am I going to write about? Writing is just for a few.'" Now, after completing the course, Katherine says, "I discovered the secret about writing. In order to be a writer, we just have to write from ourselves, and add feelings to it. I could experiment and while I was writing that all my best memories came out, and that made me feel alive again."

Becoming a Successful Girl Scout Leader
by Lisa Beaulieu

Attention all Girl Scout leaders. Do you want to hold successful meetings? Well, here are a few ideas to get you started. For the past seven years I have been a Girl Scout leader. Over the years I have learned how to hold successful meetings. All the leaders go through mandatory training courses, but I believe experience is the key to holding good meetings.

Although there are many rules and regulations that must be followed the most important thing is to have fun. You should let the girls have some free time at the beginning of the meeting to socialize. Remember some of the girls only see each other once a week. The girls need to form a bond to become a troop. They will be able to accomplish a lot more once they get to know one another.

You need to have rules to keep the meetings orderly. Have the girls help set the ground rules. This should be done at the beginning of the year. You can review the rules throughout the year if needed. They seem to follow rules they make much better than ones adults have forced on them. Have them think about how they would like to be treated, and have them include these things in their set of rules. Some of the things the girls in my troop have included in their rules are don't interrupt when someone is talking, don't laugh at anyone's ideas, and let everyone have a chance to express their ideas and opinions.

Have the girls choose which badges they want to work on. The leaders will need to help with some of the activities, or supply resources. Sometimes a few suggestions go a long way. When the girls complain they are bored, remind them they chose to do the badge, and the troop needs to complete the requirements to earn the badge.

You should ask the girls to pick what kind of community service projects they would like to do. You can offer some suggestions. Most of the time they come up with some great ideas on their own. Last year the girls decided to visit a nursing home. They sang, played musical instruments, and did crafts with the residents. They also planned, shopped, cooked, and served a meal at a homeless shelter. Again if it is something they pick to do, usually they work hard at it. You may need to help set up times or dates for these projects, but the girls do most of the work themselves.

Some meetings should just be "fun" meetings. You should let your girls decide if they want to have holiday parties, or do crafts. For Halloween the girls wanted to have a party. They did all the planning. They had lots of junk food, like cookies, cupcakes, and candy. They had punch and soda to drink. They brought in music, decorations, and even had a donut on a string contest. No matter how old the girls are they still like to have parties and do an occasional craft. Sometimes just going outside on a short hike or playing games is a nice break in the usual schedule. A lot of the time you can match these activities to a badge requirement.

If the meetings get out of control put up the quiet sign. Remind the girls of the rules they set. This usually helps to quiet things down. Remember around the holidays the girls are usually wild, so this is a good time for a "fun" meeting. A party or a craft usually gets you through a meeting at this time of the year.

These few simple tips will help you have a fun and successful year with the girls. Remember the girls' input is crucial. This is their troop. Learning new things and having

fun with your team is what Girl Scouting is all about. The girls also learn leadership skills, perform community service, and become well-rounded young women with the experiences they have in Girl Scouting.

Lisa Beaulieu is a 42-year-old resident of Bradford, MA. Currently, she is an electronic technician and her career goal is to become a dental hygienist. She was a student in Mary O'Neil's fall 2002 Basic Writing class. At the beginning of the semester, Lisa hated writing and believed that it was her worst nightmare. Now, she says she feels much more comfortable about it.

How to Pack the Perfect Suitcase
by Paulina Engel

Are you tired of carrying five suitcases for only a weekend getaway? Are you worn out trying to tell your wife or husband, "We are only going away for two days"? Well say no more! I have the solution for you! I have been packing for my family and friends for over 20 years. I learned this trade from my mother years ago, and if you follow these easy steps, you can go to Africa for a month and you will have everything that you need and more in just one suitcase.

Before we start this process of packing your suitcase, you need to know that there are several sizes of suitcases depending on the length of your trip. For example, if you were to go to the beach for a weekend getaway with your husband, you only need a small suitcase, not the overnight bag. If you were to go to South America for a month, you will need a larger suitcase. To find your perfect suitcase, you may go to Marshall's, TJMaxx or any other discount store where you can find suitcases at a very reasonable price and quality.

Also you need to take into consideration how many people are going on this trip. Why do I need to know this? The beauty of packing is how we can save space when we share a suitcase with the other member of the family. If it is only you and your better half for that long awaited weekend away from the little munchkins, then you only need one small suitcase for the both of you.

Now that we have established the size of your suitcase, we can start the packing process. The next thing to do is to get all of the clothes that you and your husband are planning on wearing. Remember this is only a weekend! For example, you want to wear that beautiful dress that is perfect for walking on the beach. Also you want that adorable pantsuit that your aunt Martha gave you for Christmas. All of that is fine, but we need to be practical, and pack what is important, not what we think we might be wearing. From that perspective I would say you would need one bathing suit, one pair of pants or a dress if you prefer, a blouse, a pair of nice shoes to go with your outfit, your pajamas, your undergarments, robe, slippers and a pair of sandals for the beach. As for your husband, he would also need a swimming suit, a pair of nice pants, two shirts, his pajamas, undergarments, two pairs of socks and a pair of shoes. You would also need a bag with your toiletries, including your deodorants, lotions, toothbrushes and anything else that you need for your weekend. I recommend trial sizes because of the space that you will save by doing this.

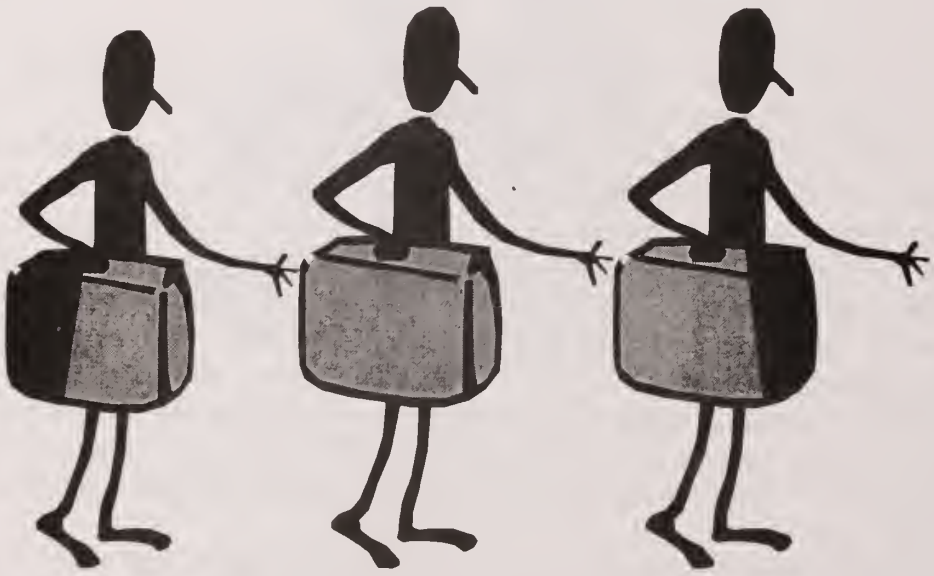
The third step is to go to your pantry and get several of the small plastic bags that you recycle from the grocery store. You will also need four big plastic bags, the ones you can get at the dry cleaners when you send your clothes to be pressed. In addition, you will need tissue paper if you have it, or more small plastic bags. You may wonder, why plastic bags and tissue paper? Let me tell you, plastic bags and tissue paper will keep your clothes wrinkle free. If you are packing a jacket you should put tissue paper inside the sleeves and then put a big plastic bag over it. Then it will arrive to its destination wrinkle free.

The fourth step is to put all of your shoes in the small individual plastic bags. Put your undergarments inside another small plastic bag, or if you have tissue paper you can wrap them with it. Inside the shoes you can put some of your undergarments or the socks,

which will help you save space. After that, put one of the big plastic bags over your dress and fold it into three parts. The other big plastic bag is for your husband's pants. You will need to fold them in three parts too. The last bag is for the blouse and shirts. They need to be folded in half and placed inside of the plastic bag. Put your bag of toiletries inside a small plastic bag in case something leaks.

The fifth step is to place the shoes at the bottom of the suitcase, and then you will put your toiletries right beside them with the swimsuits. For the second layer, you should put your pajamas and robe, then your husband's pants, your blouse and the shirts, and on top of that you will place your beautiful dress and anything else that you need to accessorize your outfits.

The last but not least step is to close your suitcase. If your suitcase does not zip, then you need to check your shoes; maybe they need some rearrangement. Sometimes you need to move things a little to make sure you do not have any space in between them. After doing that, I can assure you that you will have the best packed suitcase ever. You can go on your trip and have a good time, knowing that all of your belongings are in only one suitcase and your husband is not complaining about how many suitcases he has to carry for only a weekend getaway.



Paulina is a 42-year-old resident of Amesbury, MA. She was a student in Mary O'Neil's Basic Writing class during the fall 2002 semester. Before taking Mary's Basic Writing class, Paulina felt very bad because she had no confidence at all, but now she says she feels, "Great. I think I can express myself better than I used to."

A Bright Start
by Beverly Sheehan

How many of us out there have looked around into the rooms of our homes or apartments, tired of seeing the same old colors on our walls? Maybe the white that once was a clean shining color now is dull and fading and you have dirt from everyday occurrences like kids' dirty hands leaving their marks, or maybe you just want to get crazy and creative. Then it's time for a change. Painting is one of the less expensive ways of giving a room a makeover.

Have I gotten you excited yet? Well if not, I believe you will be when you're done. Some of the supplies you will need include paint brushes and rollers, drop cloths, ladder, tape, and maybe some primer paint. So let's begin by giving some thought to choosing some colors you'll want to use on your ceiling, walls, and woodwork. Once you have the colors, next you need to decide what you're most comfortable working with like paint brushes and what size. Rollers also come in different sizes. Because most of us are not perfect, we'll need drop cloths and tape (used later for marking spots you want to keep free of paint). It comes off easy. I like to use the blue masking tape and sometimes a caulking sealer gun can be useful for filling cracks in the walls, around the windows and in crevices.

First you must prepare your work area. Looking around, move furniture either out of the room or maybe toward the center, using drop cloths to cover furniture or rugs. You will want a clean area to work on, so if needed you may choose to wash down the areas to be painted with a mild detergent and hot water. You may also need to use a broom to dust the cobwebs that accumulate in the corners of the ceiling. The next step will be to closely look for cracks around window frames, or gaps where the top of the walls meet the ceiling. If this is the case, it needs to be addressed first. The caulking gun can be used to fill these openings. It is simple to use; it is similar to squeezing toothpaste from the tube. You may want to use your finger to smooth it over to encourage a smooth line with a good seal. Once dry with a nice permanent seal, we're ready for our next step.

Open the ceiling paint can. You may need to mix it with a paint stick. You will know if it needs to be mixed if the paint appears to be separated when you open the can. Now you can pour your paint into a paint pan, get your roller out and dip it in the pan. Get excess paint off. A good way to do this is to roll the roller back and forth at the dry end of the paint pan. Standing up on a ladder, roll in a forward and back movement covering the whole ceiling. Let it dry for about an hour or until it is not tacky to the touch, and repeat with a second coat. With the ceiling completed we will next start with the walls. It looks good so far.

This is where the tape comes in handy. Tape off the bottom of the woodwork where the walls meet, or on the sides of woodwork where the walls meet. This will give you a little more confidence. There is less worry that paint will hit the tape and you will get straighter lines with tape in place. Now is the time to open the wall paint. Again you may need to mix with a paint stick, and pour it into a pan. What will be different this time is to start near the top of the ceiling using a paintbrush or small roller carefully painting four or five inches down from the ceiling and in the corners. This is referred to as cutting in. Now with this done, again you may use a roller, dipping it in paint, removing excess paint. Start rolling in an up and down motion, covering the entire wall. I find it easier to

do the entire cutting in process first, and then I paint one whole wall at a time. Let dry and repeat with a second coat, and because you did the cutting in process, your ceiling has been untouched with paint you used for the walls. While the paint is still somewhat tacky, you may remove the tape you previously put on. The reason for this is if the tape wasn't smoothed on correctly you will not pull any of the paint off with the tape.

As we're nearing the end, what we have left to do is our woodwork. Again we open the paint can with the color of choice. We mix it if necessary, and pour it into the paint pan or perhaps an old cup or coffee can. It is at this point where a small brush (maybe one used for craft projects) can come in handy and also a small roller. With the small paintbrush, you will carefully paint the sides of the woodwork. You may also use a roller for the front of the woodwork. Let dry and repeat with a second coat. This will be the final thing. For any small touchups needed, use the small paintbrush and color needed. Wait until everything has dried.

Last but not least is cleaning up. First, wash off your paintbrushes and rollers, remove the drop cloths and put the furniture back. Now is the time to stand back and enjoy your hard work, and I think you will agree it was worth it. Many of us would love to be able to do major renovations, but for most of us because of the financial burden, it is out of our reach. Painting can be a cost effective way to give the appearance of a major change at minimal cost. So now you can have a bright finish if you follow my instructions.

Beverly Sheehan took Basic Writing with Dr. Carol Barron in the spring of 2003.

The Negative Effects of Media
by Kavuma Mubiazalwa

The media of today has a negative effect on young people in America. The media sends messages and images to young children who can't process the information as mature people. As a result, the majority of young children have long term effects from watching too much television such as becoming very passive. They are also affected by violence in movies, sex on television, racial prejudice and unhealthy habits such as smoking, drug use, and obesity that are promoted by the media.

At times parents have that excuse of letting their kids watch television for long hours. This is neither interactive nor a good way to promote learning. Television interferes with children's creativity, so they can't engage their own skills and imaginations because they're being entertained. The other day my uncle's 10-year-old daughter was watching a talk show, The Jerry Springer Show. All the indecent language broadcasts on national television were seen as most amusing to her. I tried to change to other programs, and the reaction I got was not good after getting insults and abuse from her.

Another problem with the media is that it influences young children to be aggressive and violent. So many children have fallen into several problems when trying to emulate the violent behaviors seen on television or video games. Most violent action shows on the media are widely due to the cheap ways of making these programs more profitable; also they get high ratings. At times the media tends to fool young people into thinking that violence can be safe, fun and harmless which isn't true at all. This is when the media teaches young people to resolve conflicts by being aggressive, and the end results become fatal. Though they try to post warnings on violence and other inappropriate content before those programs are shown, it still doesn't stop those (young kids) from trying to demonstrate the media's actions.

Another crucial source that is affecting young people's minds and actions is the sexual behavior shown by the media. The media is solely responsible for airing sexual behaviors and content to young people. Most of the production shows, sitcoms, soap operas, and rated movies contain a lot of sexual content and vulgar language, and it's so offensive to the people who are watching those kinds of programs. Actually this promotes promiscuity among young people who are ignorant about their sexual behaviors. For example the MTV-music program (Real World) tends to use sexual acts on television that attract so much attention from the viewers. Also some movies that show rape scenes encourage young people to do it to innocent girls. Such kinds of incidents happen to the unfortunate victims of rape who may become unstable and psychologically affected for the rest of their lives.

A racial perception from the media is negative and unfair to the minorities concerned. This is one of the biggest problems in America today. One selected, criticized minority group that is being pinpointed are the black people. Black people are portrayed to be troublemakers, ignorant, and regarded as people who don't want to progress in their lives, so the young people end up thinking that the black race is only involved in committing crimes and being unproductive, which isn't true.

Another way that the media has a negative influence is by promoting unhealthy habits such as obesity, smoking, and drug use. In other words, young people eat a lot of

chocolate candies which aren't good for their teeth, also fatty foods that have high cholesterol which aren't good for their health. I remember one talk show that was about obese kids below 12 years of age and weighing 200 to 350 pounds. They are under risk of having cancer under their skin, high blood pressure, diabetes and other related diseases. Also nowadays, a majority of young people in America smoke cigarettes that can develop into cancer disease.

All in all, the media negatively influences young people in America thus changing their minds which are full of illusions. This has been an obstruction to their performance at school and social gatherings. Therefore, since the media has a major influence on young people, they should set up terms and limits in order to have control of images they produce. Parents should be involved in the children's watching entertainment so that they know what is more appropriate for them. Hopefully there will be less blame on the media, which includes news and entertainment, if it devises means of not sending negative messages to young people. This would be beneficial for everyone.

Kavuma (Ronnie) is a 27-year-old resident of Lowell, MA. He was a student in Paula Richards's Basic Writing course in the fall 2002 semester. Before the semester started, Ronnie says, "My writing was so poor and I used to have problems most especially writing letters or essays at school." Now Ronnie says, "This has been a good improvement after learning the basic needs of writing essays."

The State of Sin
by Nathan Myers

Prostitution is a serious problem in this country. Prostitution is also something that should be illegal everywhere. It upsets me to know that right now there is a state in which prostitution is actually legal. The state that I am referring to is the state of Nevada. That's right; the state that offers legalized gambling also allows women and men to sell their bodies. Prostitution is not legal in all parts of Nevada. In Las Vegas, you have to be 25 miles outside of the city to buy or sell sex.

One of the biggest problems with legalized prostitution is the objectification of women. We as a country treat women as objects. We take young girls and put them up on TV wearing next to nothing. We put young women on show in magazines and also in everyday life. We make them think that they need to be beautiful, and legalized prostitution does not help that. Out of all of the bordellos that I have seen in and around Las Vegas and Reno, around 75% of them are women and only 25% men.

Another problem with legalized prostitution is the buying and selling of another human being. Sex is something that two people share when both people have given consent. Sex should not be given up if the money is right. If the young women in Nevada have the opportunity to get legal jobs as prostitutes and make a good amount of money, then they will be more enticed to sell their bodies. If more young women are selling their bodies, more men will think that women are objects and that they can be bought. All people on earth are beautiful, and no one should be able to purchase someone else for their own sexual benefit.

Another problem that comes with legalized prostitution is the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. STD's are a rapidly growing epidemic in this country, and a lot of them have no cure. The state of Nevada protects and tests all of their prostitutes, but with more promiscuous sex comes a greater risk. This is a perfect example of the risk far outweighing the benefit.

Legalized prostitution is a serious problem in the state of Nevada. It causes problems such as the objectification of women, the spread of STD's, and the purchasing of another human being. It also puts in the children's minds that it is O.K. to buy or sell sex. If we as a country do not recognize and stifle this rapid decay of morality, then the state of Nevada's morals might spread across the whole country.

Nathan is a 22-year-old resident of Andover, MA. He was a student in Luana McCuish's fall 2002 Basic Writing course. At the beginning of the semester, Nathan thought he could write a good paper off the top of his head. However, now he says, "In order to write a good paper, you need to use the writing process."

The City Government of Lawrence
by Matilde Perez

It makes me angry that the city government of Lawrence promises to do something that they cannot accomplish. Every time that there are new elections to choose a new mayor, they promise a lot of things, but then they don't do anything. Instead of just promising to do so, they should fix the streets of Lawrence. It disgusts me that every time I have to go out, I have to see the streets in bad condition. Another issue that is concerning the citizens of Lawrence is that when it is snowing, we have to wait until the next day for the plow truck to clean the snow. Also, the city government of Lawrence should be making more recreational places such as parks and gyms.

First, the city government of Lawrence should be fixing the streets. The condition of the streets of Lawrence is terrible. Most of the streets have big potholes. These potholes make the cars bump into the potholes and sustain damages. I remember one day I was riding in my car, and I saw a big pothole in the street. When I saw this big pothole I immediately wanted to avoid it, but I couldn't because it was too late. As a result of this, my car came out with a flat tire. I was very angry at this because I had to call my father, and I was late to work. Also, when it is raining, the streets get full of water and muddy. It looks horrible, and the cars get very dirty. When I see this, I ask myself, "How come the streets of Lawrence look this way?" The streets of Lawrence should be fixed as soon as possible.

Another issue that is affecting the citizens of Lawrence is when they don't plow the snow. When it is snowing, it is so beautiful, but when it is not clean, it can look ugly. This is happening to the city of Lawrence because they don't plow the street when it is snowing. It is very sad to see the city of Lawrence all dirty and muddy. Most of the time the streets get full of snow, and you cannot even go outside. Sometimes we have to wait until the next day for the plow truck to come. It makes me angry that we have to take our own shovels and clean the streets, or pay someone to clean it for us. I remember one day that it was very slippery, and my brother fell down and twisted his ankle. He was crying, and he said, "Get someone to help me because I cannot stand up!"

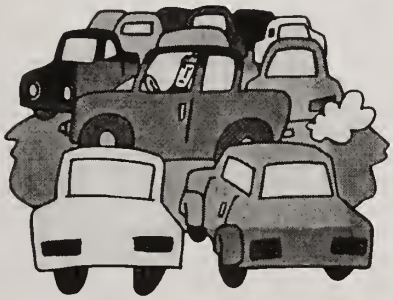
I said, "Ok, don't move from where you are, and stay still." I could not believe this was happening just because they didn't want to plow the street. Also, when the plow truck doesn't clean the snow, it is very difficult to find a parking space. Therefore, you have to get out of your car and start to shovel the snow, so you can park.

In addition, another situation that is a major problem in Lawrence is that we need more outdoor recreational places. The city government of Lawrence should be planning to make more recreational places. The children of Lawrence don't have the opportunity to say, "I want to go to the park." The reason for this is that they get bored going to the same parks because they see the same games. This situation makes the children sad because they don't have the motivation to keep them active.

Also, the city of Lawrence needs to make more gyms where the kids of our community could go. These kids want to have fun, do exercise, and play until they get tired. They don't have a lot of choices about where to go because all the places are the same. For example, they should make more gyms where the children could play basketball, baseball, and football. Therefore, the children would not be in the streets

doing bad things. The children of Lawrence are the future leaders of our community, and that is why they need to be in a safe environment.

In conclusion, instead of making a lot of promises, the city government should hear the concerns of the citizens. The streets of Lawrence should be fixed immediately because it looks terrible. It is an embarrassment to have the streets in such a really bad condition. Also, the citizens of the city of Lawrence deserve to have a clean community. The children of Lawrence want to have recreational places such as parks and gyms, so they can have fun. As a solution to this problem, I recommend that the city government of Lawrence should make a plan so that they can have a solution to these situations.



Matilde is a resident of Lawrence, MA. She is a business major and is aiming to have her own business. In the fall 2002 semester, she was a student in Paula Richards's Basic Writing class. At the beginning of the semester, Matilde was uncomfortable, confused and frustrated. Now, Matilde says, "I can write a paper, and feel confident about myself that I could write about any topic."